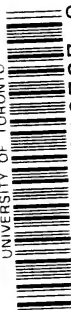


George's Mother

by

Stephen Crane

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



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GEORGE'S MOTHER





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BY
STEPHEN CRANE

AUTHOR OF
'THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE,' 'THE BLACK RIDERS,' ETC.

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EDWARD ARNOLD
LONDON
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GEORGE'S MOTHER



I.

IN the swirling rain that came at dusk the broad avenue glistened with that deep bluish tint which is so widely condemned when it is put into pictures. There were long rows of shops, whose fronts shone with full, golden light. Here and there, from druggists' windows, or from the red street-lamps that indicated the positions of fire-alarm boxes, a flare of

uncertain, wavering crimson was thrown upon the wet pavements.

The lights made shadows, in which the buildings loomed with a new and tremendous massiveness, like castles and fortresses. There were endless processions of people, mighty hosts, with umbrellas waving, banner-like, over them. Horse-cars, aglitter with new paint, rumbled in steady array between the pillars that supported the elevated railroad. The whole street resounded with the tinkle of bells, the roar of iron-shod wheels on the cobbles, the ceaseless trample of the hundreds of feet. Above all, too, could be heard the loud screams of the tiny newsboys, who scurried in all directions. Upon the corners, standing in from the dripping eaves, were many loungers,

descended from the world that used to prostrate itself before pageantry.

A brown young man went along the avenue. He held a tin lunch-pail under his arm in a manner that was evidently uncomfortable. He was puffing at a corn-cob pipe. His shoulders had a self-reliant poise, and the hang of his arms and the raised veins of his hands showed him to be a man who worked with his muscles.

As he passed a street-corner, a man in old clothes gave a shout of surprise, and, rushing impetuously forward, grasped his hand.

‘Hello, Kelcey, ol’ boy!’ cried the man in old clothes. ‘How’s th’ boy, anyhow? Where in thunder yeh been fer th’ last seventeen years? I’ll be hanged if you ain’t th’ last man I ever expected t’ see!’

The brown youth put his pail to the ground and grinned. 'Well, if it ain't ol' Charley Jones,' he said ecstatically, shaking hands. 'How are yeh, anyhow? Where yeh been keepin' yerself? I ain't seen yeh fer a year.'

'Well, I should say so. Why, th' last time I saw you was up in Handyville!'

'Sure! On Sunday, we——'

'Sure. Out at Bill Sickles' place. Let's go get a drink.'

They made toward a little glass-fronted saloon that sat blinking jovially at the crowds. It engulfed them with a gleeful motion of its too widely-smiling lips.

'What'll yeh take, Kelcey?'

'Oh, I guess I'll take a beer.'

'Gimme little whisky, John.'

The two friends leaned against the bar,

and looked with enthusiasm upon each other.

‘Well, well, I’m thunderin’ glad t’ see yeh,’ said Jones.

‘Well, I guess,’ replied Kelcey. ‘Here’s to yeh, ol’ man.’

‘Let ’er go.’

They lifted their glasses, glanced fervidly at each other, and drank.

‘Yeh ain’t changed much, on’y yeh’ve growed like th’ devil,’ said Jones reflectively, as he put down his glass; ‘I’d know yeh anywheres.’

‘Certainly yeh would,’ said Kelcey; ‘an’ I knew you, too, th’ minute I saw yeh. Yer changed, though.’

‘Yes,’ admitted Jones with some complacency; ‘I s’pose I am.’ He regarded himself in the mirror that multiplied the

bottles on the shelf back of the bar. He should have seen a grinning face with a rather pink nose. His derby was perched carelessly on the back part of his head. Two wisps of hair straggled down over his hollow temples. There was something very worldly and wise about him. Life did not seem to confuse him. Evidently he understood its complications. His hand thrust into his trousers-pocket, where he jingled keys, and his hat perched back on his head, expressed a young man of vast knowledge. His extensive acquaintance with bar-tenders aided him materially in this habitual expression of wisdom.

Having finished, he turned to the bar-keeper. 'John, has any of th' gang been in t'-night yet ?'

'No—not yet,' said the bar-keeper ; 'ol'

Bleecker was aroun' this afternoon about four. He said if I seen any of th' boys t' tell 'em he'd be up t'-night if he could get away. I saw Connor an' that other fellah goin' down th' avenyeh about an hour ago. I guess they'll be back after awhile.'

'This is th' hang-out fer a great gang,' said Jones, turning to Kelcey. 'They're a great crowd, I tell yeh. We own th' place when we get started. Come aroun' some night. Any night, almost—t'-night, b' jiminy! They'll almost all be here, an' I'd like t' interduce yeh. They're a great gang—gre-e-at!'

'I'd like teh,' said Kelcey.

'Well, come ahead, then,' cried the other cordially. 'Ye'd like t' know 'em. It's an outa sight crowd. Come aroun' t'-night!'

‘I will if I can.’

‘Well, yeh ain’t got anything t’ do, have yeh?’ demanded Jones. ‘Well, come along, then. Yeh might just as well spend yer time with a good crowd ’a fellahs. An’ it’s a great gang—great—gre-e-at!’

‘Well, I must make fer home now, anyhow,’ said Kelcey. ‘It’s late as blazes. What’ll yeh take this time, ol’ man?’

‘Gimme little more whisky, John.’

‘Guess I’ll take another beer.’

Jones emptied the whisky into his large mouth, and then put the glass upon the bar.

‘Been in th’ city long?’ he asked. ‘Um—well, three years is a good deal fer a slick man. Doin’ well? Oh! well, nobody’s doin’ well these days.’ He looked down mournfully at his shabby clothes.

'Father's dead, ain't 'ee? Yeh don't say so? Fell off a scaffoldin', didn't 'ee? I heard it somewheres. Mother's livin', of course? I thought she was. Fine ol' lady—fi-i-ne! Well, you're th' last of her boys. Was five of yeh onct, wasn't there? I knew four m'self. Yes, five. I thought so. An' all gone but you, hey? Well, you'll have t' brace up an' be a comfort t' th' ol' mother. Well, well, well, who would 'a thought that on'y you'd be left out 'a all that mob 'a tow-headed kids! Well, well, well, it's a queer world, ain't it?'

A contemplation of this thought made him sad. He sighed, and moodily watched the other sip beer.

'Well, well, it's a queer world—a damn queer world.'

'Yes,' said Kelcey, 'I'm th' on'y one

left !' There was an accent of discomfort in his voice. He did not like this dwelling upon a sentiment that was connected with himself.

'How is th' ol' lady, anyhow?' continued Jones. 'Th' last time I remember she was as spry as a little ol' cricket, an' was helpeltin' aroun' th' country lecturin' before W. C. T. U.'s an' one thing an' another.'

'Oh, she's pretty well,' said Kelcey.

'An' outa five boys you're th' on'y one she's got left? Well, well—have another drink before yeh go.'

'Oh, I guess I've had enough.'

A wounded expression came into Jones's eyes. 'Oh, come on,' he said.

'Well, I'll take another beer !'

'Gimme little more whisky, John !'

When they had concluded this ceremony, Jones went with his friend to the door of the saloon. 'Good-bye, ol' man,' he said genially. His homely features shone with friendliness. 'Come aroun', now, sure. T'-night! See? They're a great crowd. Gre-e-at!'

II.

A MAN with a red, mottled face put forth his head from a window and cursed violently. He flung a bottle high across two backyards at a window of the opposite tenement. It broke against the bricks of the house, and the fragments fell crackling upon the stones below. The man shook his fist.

A bare-armed woman, making an array of clothes on a line in one of the yards glanced casually up at the man and listened to his words. Her eyes followed his to the other tenement. From a distant

window a youth with a pipe yelled some comments upon the poor aim. Two children, being in the proper yard, picked up the bits of broken glass and began to fondle them as new toys.

From the window at which the man raged came the sound of an old voice, singing. It quavered and trembled out into the air as if a sound-spirit had a broken wing.

‘Should I be car-reed tew th’ skies
O-on flow’ry be-eds of ee-ease,
While others fought tew win th’ prize
An’ sailed through blood-ee seas?’

The man in the opposite window was greatly enraged. He continued to swear.

A little old woman was the owner of the voice. In a fourth-story room of the red and black tenement she was trudging on a journey. In her arms she bore pots and

pans, and sometimes a broom and dust-pan. She wielded them like weapons. Their weight seemed to have bended her back and crooked her arms until she walked with difficulty. Often she plunged her hands into water at a sink. She splashed about, the dwindled muscles working to and fro under the loose skin of her arms. She came from the sink, steaming and bedraggled as if she had crossed a flooded river.

There was the flurry of a battle in this room. Through the clouded dust or steam one could see the thin figure dealing mighty blows. Always her way seemed beset. Her broom was continually poised, lance-wise, at dust demons. There came clashings and clangings as she strove with her tireless foes.

It was a picture of indomitable courage. And as she went on her way her voice was often raised in a long cry, a strange war-chant, a shout of battle and defiance, that rose and fell in harsh screams, and exasperated the ears of the man with the red, mottled face.

‘Should I be car-reed tew th’ skies
O-on flow’ry be-eds of ee-ease——’

Finally she halted for a moment. Going to the window, she sat down and mopped her face with her apron. It was a lull, a moment of respite. Still it could be seen that she even then was planning skirmishes, charges, campaigns. She gazed thoughtfully about the room, and noted the strength and position of her enemies. She was very alert.

At last she returned to the mantel.

'Five o'clock,' she murmured, scrutinizing a little, swaggering, nickel-plated clock.

She looked out at chimneys growing thickly on the roofs. A man at work on one seemed like a bee. In the intricate yards below, vine-like lines had strange leaves of cloth. To her ears there came the howl of the man with the red, mottled face. He was engaged in a furious altercation with the youth who had called attention to his poor aim. They were like animals in a jungle.

In the distance an enormous brewery towered over the other buildings. Great gilt letters advertised a brand of beer. Thick smoke came from funnels and spread near it like vast and powerful wings. The structure seemed a great bird, flying. The letters of the sign made

a chain of gold hanging from its neck. The little old woman looked at the brewery. It vaguely interested her, for a moment, as a stupendous affair, a machine of mighty strength.

Presently she sprang from her rest and began to buffet with her shrivelled arms. In a moment the battle was again in full swing. Terrific blows were given and received. There arose the clattering uproar of a new fight. The little intent warrior never hesitated nor faltered. She fought with a strong and relentless will. Beads and lines of perspiration stood upon her forehead.

Three blue plates were leaning in a row on the shelf back of the stove. The little old woman had seen it done somewhere. In front of them swaggered the round

nickel-plated clock. Her son had stuck many cigarette pictures in the rim of a looking-glass that hung near. Occasional chromos were tacked upon the yellowed walls of the room. There was one in a gilt frame. It was quite an affair in reds and greens. They all seemed like trophies.

It began to grow dark. A mist came winding. Rain plashed softly upon the window-sill. A lamp had been lighted in the opposite tenement ; the strong orange glare revealed the man with a red, mottled face. He was seated by a table, smoking and reflecting.

The little old woman looked at the clock again. 'Quarter 'a six.'

She had paused for a moment, but she now hurled herself fiercely at the stove

that lurked in the gloom, red-eyed, like a dragon. It hissed, and there was renewed clangour of blows. The little old woman dashed to and fro.

III.

As it grew toward seven o'clock the little old woman became nervous. She often would drop into a chair and sit staring at the little clock.

'I wonder why he don't come,' she continually repeated. There was a small, curious note of despair in her voice. As she sat thinking and staring at the clock, the expressions of her face changed swiftly. All manner of emotions flickered in her eyes and about her lips. She was evidently perceiving in her imagination the

journey of a loved person. She dreamed for him mishaps and obstacles. Something tremendous and irritating was hindering him from coming to her.

She had lighted an oil-lamp. It flooded the room with vivid yellow glare. The table, in its oil-cloth covering, had previously appeared like a bit of bare, brown desert. It now was a white garden, growing the fruits of her labour.

‘Seven o’clock!’ she murmured finally. She was aghast.

Then suddenly she heard a step upon the stair. She sprang up and began to bustle about the room. The little fearful emotions passed at once from her face. She seemed now to be ready to scold.

Young Kelcey entered the room. He

gave a sigh of relief, and dropped his pail in a corner. He was evidently greatly wearied by a hard day of toil.

The little old woman hobbled over to him and raised her wrinkled lips. She seemed on the verge of tears and an outburst of reproaches.

‘Hello!’ he cried, in a voice of cheer. ‘Been gettin’ anxious?’

‘Yes,’ she said, hovering about him. ‘Where yeh been, George? What made yeh so late? I’ve been waitin’ th’ longest while. Don’t throw your coat down there. Hang it up behind th’ door.’

The son put his coat on the proper hook, and then went to splatter water in a tin wash-basin at the sink.

‘Well, yeh see, I met Jones—you remember Jones? Ol’ Handyville fellah.

An' we had t' stop an' talk over ol' times. Jones is quite a boy.'

The little old woman's mouth set in a sudden straight line. 'Oh, that Jones!' she said. 'I don't like him.'

The youth interrupted a flurry of white towel to give a glance of irritation.

'Well, now, what's th' use of talkin' that way?' he said to her. 'What do yeh know 'bout 'im? Ever spoke to 'im in yer life?'

'Well, I don't know as I ever did since he grew up,' replied the little old woman. 'But I know he ain't th' kind 'a man I'd like t' have you go around with. He ain't a good man. I'm sure he ain't. He drinks.'

Her son began to laugh. 'Th' dickens he does!'

He seemed amazed, but not shocked, at this information.

She nodded her head with the air of one who discloses a dreadful thing. 'I'm sure of it! Once I saw 'im comin' outa Simpson's Hotel, up in Handyville, an' he could hardly walk. He drinks! I'm sure he drinks!'

'Holy smoke!' said Kelcey.

They sat down at the table and began to wreck the little white garden. The youth leaned back in his chair, in the manner of a man who is paying for things. His mother bended alertly forward, apparently watching each mouthful. She perched on the edge of her chair, ready to spring to her feet and run to the closet or the stove for anything that he might need. She was as anxious as a young

mother with a babe. In the careless and comfortable attitude of the son there was denoted a great deal of dignity.

‘Yeh ain’t eatin’ much t’-night, George?’

‘Well, I ain’t very hungry, t’ tell th’ truth.’

‘Don’t yeh like yer supper, dear? Yeh must eat somethin’, chile. Yeh mustn’t go without.’

‘Well, I’m eatin’ somethin’, ain’t I?’

He wandered aimlessly through the meal. She sat over behind the little blackened coffee-pot and gazed affectionately upon him.

After a time she began to grow agitated. Her worn fingers were gripped. It could be seen that a great thought was within her. She was about to venture something. She had arrived at a supreme

moment. 'George,' she said suddenly, 'come t' prayer-meetin' with me t'-night.'

The young man dropped his fork. 'Say, you must be crazy!' he said in amazement.

'Yes, dear,' she continued rapidly, in a small, pleading voice, 'I'd like t' have yeh go with me onct in a while. Yeh never go with me any more, dear, an' I'd like t' have yeh go. Yeh ain't been anywheres at all with me in th' longest while.'

'Well,' he said—'well; but what th' blazes——'

'Ah, come on!' said the little old woman. She went to him, and put her arms about his neck. She began to coax him with caresses.

The young man grinned. 'Thunder-

ation!' he said; 'what would I do at a prayer-meetin'?'

The mother considered him to be consenting. She did a little antique caper.

'Well, yeh can come an' take care 'a yer mother,' she cried gleefully. 'It's such a long walk every Thursday night alone, an' don't yeh s'pose that when I have such a big, fine, strappin' boy I want 'im t' beau me aroun' some? Ah, I knew ye'd come!'

He smiled for a moment, indulgent of her humour. But presently his face turned a shade of discomfort. 'But——' he began, protesting.

'Ah, come on!' she continually repeated.

He began to be vexed. He frowned into the air. A vision came to him of

dreary blackness arranged in solemn rows. A mere dream of it was depressing.

‘But——’ he said again. He was obliged to make great search for an argument. Finally he concluded: ‘But what th’ blazes would I do at prayer-meetin’?’

In his ears was the sound of a hymn, made by people who tilted their heads at a prescribed angle of devotion. It would be too apparent that they were all better than he. When he entered they would turn their heads and regard him with suspicion. This would be an enormous aggravation, since he was certain that he was as good as they.

‘Well, now, y’ see,’ he said, quite gently, ‘I don’t wanta go, an’ it wouldn’t do me no good t’ go if I didn’t wanta go.’

His mother’s face swiftly changed. She

breathed a huge sigh, the counterpart of ones he had heard upon like occasions. She put a tiny black bonnet on her head, and wrapped her figure in an old shawl. She cast a martyr-like glance upon her son, and went mournfully away. She resembled a limited funeral procession.

The young man writhed under it to an extent. He kicked moodily at a table-leg. When the sound of her footfalls died away he felt distinctly relieved.

IV.

THAT night, when Kelcey arrived at the little smiling saloon, he found his friend Jones standing before the bar engaged in a violent argument with a stout man.

‘ Oh, well,’ this latter person was saying, ‘ you can make a lot of noise, Charley, for a man that never says anything—let’s have a drink !’

Jones was waving his arms and delivering splintering blows upon some distant theories. The stout man chuckled fatly and winked at the bar-tender.

The orator ceased for a moment to say, 'Gimme little whisky, John.' At the same time he perceived young Kelcey. He sprang forward with a welcoming cry. 'Hello, ol' man! didn't much think ye'd come.' He led him to the stout man.

'Mr. Bleecker—my friend Mr. Kelcey!'

'How d'yeh do?'

'Mr. Kelcey, I'm happy to meet you, sir; have a drink.'

They drew up in line and waited. The busy hands of the bar-tender made glasses clink. Mr. Bleecker, in a very polite way, broke the waiting silence.

'Never been here before, I believe, have you, Mr. Kelcey?'

The young man felt around for a high-bred reply. 'Er—no—I've never had that—er—pleasure,' he said.

After a time the strained and wary courtesy of their manners wore away. It became evident to Bleecker that his importance slightly dazzled the young man. He grew warmer. Obviously, the youth was one whose powers of perception were developed. Directly, then, he launched forth into a tale of bygone days, when the world was better. He had known all the great men of that age. He reproduced his conversations with them. There were traces of pride and of mournfulness in his voice. He rejoiced at the glory of the world of dead spirits. He grieved at the youth and flippancy of the present one. He lived with his head in the clouds of the past, and he seemed obliged to talk of what he saw there.

Jones nudged Kelcey ecstatically in the

ribs. 'You've got th' ol' man started in great shape,' he whispered.

Kelcey was proud that the prominent character of the place talked at him, glancing into his eyes for appreciation of fine points.

Presently they left the bar, and going into a little rear room, took seats about a table. A gas-jet with a coloured globe shed a crimson radiance. The polished wood of walls and furniture gleamed with faint rose-coloured reflections. Upon the floor sawdust was thickly sprinkled.

Two other men presently came. By the time Bleecker had told three tales of the grand past, Kelcey was slightly acquainted with everybody.

He admired Bleecker immensely. He developed a brotherly feeling for the

others, who were all gentle-spoken. He began to feel that he was passing the happiest evening of his life. His companions were so jovial and good-natured; and everything they did was marked by such courtesy.

For a time the two men who had come in late did not presume to address him directly. They would say: 'Jones, won't your friend have so and so, or so and so?' And Bleecker would begin his orations: 'Now, Mr. Kelcey, don't you think——'

Presently he began to believe that he was a most remarkably fine fellow, who had at last found his place in a crowd of most remarkably fine fellows.

Jones occasionally breathed comments into his ear.

'I tell yeh, Bleecker's an ol'-timer. He

was a husky guy in his day, yeh can bet. He was one 'a th' best known men in N' York onct. Yeh ought to hear him tell about——'

Kelcey listened intently. He was profoundly interested in these intimate tales of men who had gleamed in the rays of old suns.

'That O'Connor's a damn fine fellah,' interjected Jones once, referring to one of the others; 'he's one 'a th' best fellahs I ever knowed. He's always on th' dead level, an' he's always jest th' same as yeh see him now—good-natured an' grinnin'.'

Kelcey nodded. He could well believe it.

When he offered to buy drinks there came a loud volley of protests. 'No, no, Mr. Kelcey,' cried Bleecker; 'no, no.

To-night you are our guest. Some other time——'

'Here,' said O'Connor; 'it's my turn now.'

He called and pounded for the bar-tender. He then sat with a coin in hand warily eyeing the others. He was ready to frustrate them if they offered to pay.

After a time Jones began to develop qualities of great eloquence and wit. His companions laughed. 'It's the whisky talking now,' said Bleecker.

He grew earnest and impassioned; he delivered speeches on various subjects. His lectures were to him very imposing. The force of his words thrilled him. Sometimes he was overcome.

The others agreed with him in all things. Bleecker grew almost tender, and

considerately placed words here and there for his use. As Jones became fiercely energetic the others became more docile in agreeing. They soothed him with friendly interjections.

His mode changed directly. He began to sing popular airs with enthusiasm. He congratulated his companions upon being in his society. They were excited by his frenzy. They began to fraternize in jovial fashion. It was understood that they were true and tender spirits. They had come away from a grinding world filled with men who were harsh.

When one of them chose to divulge some place where the world had pierced him, there was a chorus of violent sympathy. They rejoiced at their temporary isolation and safety.

Once a man, completely drunk, stumbled along the floor of the saloon. He opened the door of the little room and made a show of entering. The men sprang instantly to their feet. They were ready to throttle any invader of their island. They elbowed each other in rivalry as to who should take upon himself the brunt of an encounter.

‘Oh!’ said the drunken individual, swaying on his legs and blinking at the party—
‘oh! thish private room?’

‘That’s what it is, Willie,’ said Jones.
‘An’ you git outa here, er we’ll throw yeh out.’

‘That’s what we will,’ said the others.

‘Oh!’ said the drunken man. He blinked at them aggrievedly for an instant and then went away.

They sat down again. Kelcey felt in a way that he would have liked to display his fidelity to the others by whipping the intruder.

The bar-tender came often. 'Gee, you fellahs er tanks!' he said in a jocular manner, as he gathered empty glasses and polished the table with his little towel.

Through the exertions of Jones, the little room began to grow clamorous. The tobacco smoke eddied about the forms of the men in ropes and wreaths. Near the ceiling there was a thick gray cloud.

Each man explained in his way that he was totally out of place in the before-mentioned world. They were possessed of various virtues, which were unappreciated by those with whom they were commonly obliged to mingle—they were fitted for a

tree-shaded land, where everything was peace.

Now that five of them had congregated, it gave them happiness to speak their inmost thoughts without fear of being misunderstood.

As he drank more beer Kelcey felt his breast expand with manly feeling. He knew that he was capable of sublime things. He wished that some day one of his present companions would come to him for relief. His mind pictured a little scene. In it he was magnificent in his friendship.

He looked upon the beaming faces and knew that if at that instant there should come a time for a great sacrifice he would blissfully make it. He would pass tranquilly into the unknown, or into bank-

ruptcy, amid the ejaculations of his companions upon his many virtues.

They had no bickerings during the evening. If one chose to momentarily assert himself, the others instantly submitted.

They exchanged compliments. Once old Bleecker stared at Jones for a few moments. Suddenly he broke out :

‘ Jones, you’re one of the finest fellows I ever knew !’

A flush of pleasure went over the other’s face, and then he made a modest gesture, the protest of a humble man.

‘ Don’t flim-flam me, ol’ boy,’ he said with earnestness.

But Bleecker roared that he was serious about it.

The two men arose and shook hands

emotionally. Jones butted against the table and knocked off a glass.

Afterward a general hand-shaking was inaugurated. Brotherly sentiments flew about the room. There was an uproar of fraternal feeling.

Jones began to sing. He beat time with precision and dignity. He gazed into the eyes of his companions, trying to call music from their souls. O'Connor joined in heartily, but with another tune. Off in a corner old Bleecker was making a speech.

The bar-tender came to the door. 'Gee, you fellahs er making a row. It's time fer me t' shut up th' front th' place, an' you mugs better sit on yerselves. It's one o'clock.'

They began to argue with him. Kel-

cey, however, sprang to his feet. 'One o'clock?' he said. 'Holy smoke, I mus' be flyin'!'

There came protesting howls from Jones. Bleecker ceased his oration.

'My dear boy——' he began.

Kelcey searched for his hat.

'I've got a go t' work at seven,' he said.

The others watched him with discomfort in their eyes.

'Well,' said O'Connor, 'if one goes we might as well all go.'

They sadly took their hats and filed out.

The cold air of the street filled Kelcey with vague surprise. It made his head feel hot. As for his legs, they were like willow-twigs.

A few yellow lights blinked. In front of an all-night restaurant a huge red electric lamp hung and sputtered. Horse-car bells jingled far down the street. Overhead a train thundered on the elevated road.

On the sidewalk the men took fervid leave. They clutched hands with extraordinary force, and proclaimed, for the last time, ardent and admiring friendships.

When he arrived at his home Kelcey proceeded with caution. His mother had left a light burning low. He stumbled once in his voyage across the floor. As he paused to listen he heard the sound of little snores coming from her room.

He lay awake for a few moments and thought of the evening. He had a plea-

surable consciousness that he had made a good impression upon those fine fellows. He felt that he had spent the most delightful evening of his life.

V.

KELCEY was cross in the morning. His mother had been obliged to shake him a great deal, and it had seemed to him a most unjust thing. Also, when he, blinking his eyes, had entered the kitchen, she had said : 'Yeh left th' lamp burnin' all night last night, George. How many times must I tell yeh never t' leave th' lamp burnin' ?'

He ate the greater part of his breakfast in silence, moodily stirring his coffee, and glaring at a remote corner of the room

with eyes that felt as if they had been baked. When he moved his eyelids there was a sensation that they were cracking. In his mouth there was a singular taste. It seemed to him that he had been sucking the end of a wooden spoon. Moreover, his temper was rampant within him. It sought something to devour.

Finally he said savagely : ' Damn these early hours !'

His mother jumped as if he had flung a missile at her. ' Why, George——' she began.

Kelcey broke in again. ' Oh, I know all that ; but this gettin' up in th' mornin' so early makes me sick. Jest when a man is gettin' his mornin' nap he's gota get up. I——'

' George, dear,' said his mother, ' yeh

know how I hate yeh t' swear, dear. Now, please don't.' She looked beseechingly at him.

He made a swift gesture. 'Well, I ain't swearin', am I?' he demanded. 'I was on'y sayin' that this gettin'-up business gives me a pain, wasn't I?'

'Well, yeh know how swearin' hurts me,' protested the little old woman. She seemed about to sob. She gazed off retrospectively. She apparently was recalling persons who had never been profane.

'I don't see where yeh ever caught this way 'a swearin' out at everything,' she continued presently. 'Fred, ner John, ner Willie never swore a bit. Ner Tom neither, except when he was real mad.'

The son made another gesture. It was directed into the air, as if he saw there a

phantom injustice. 'Oh, good thunder!' he said, with an accent of despair. Thereupon he relapsed into a mood of silence. He sombrely regarded his plate.

This demeanour speedily reduced his mother to meekness. When she spoke again it was in a conciliatory voice. 'George, dear, won't yeh bring some sugar home t'-night?' It could be seen that she was asking for a crown of gold.

Kelcey aroused from his semi-slumber.

'Yes, if I kin remember it,' he said.

The little old woman arose to stow her son's lunch into the pail. When he had finished his breakfast he stalked for a time about the room in a dignified way. He put on his coat and hat, and, taking his lunch-pail, went to the door. There

he halted, and without turning his head, stiffly said :

‘ Well, good-bye.’

The little old woman saw that she had offended her son. She did not seek an explanation. She was accustomed to these phenomena. She made haste to surrender.

‘ Ain’t yeh goin’ t’ kiss me good-bye?’ she asked in a little woful voice.

The youth made a pretence of going on deaf-heartedly. He wore the dignity of an injured monarch.

Then the little old woman called again in forsaken accents : ‘ George — George ! ain’t yeh goin’ t’ kiss me good-bye?’ When he moved he found that she was hanging to his coat-tails.

He turned eventually with a murmur of a sort of tenderness. ‘ Why, ’a course I

am,' he said. He kissed her. Withal, there was an undertone of superiority in his voice, as if he were granting an astonishing suit. She looked at him with reproach and gratitude and affection.

She stood at the head of the stairs and watched his hand sliding along the rail as he went down. Occasionally she could see his arm and part of his shoulder. When he reached the first-floor she called to him 'Good-bye!'

The little old woman went back to her work in the kitchen with a frown of perplexity upon her brow. 'I wonder what was th' matter with George this mornin',' she mused. 'He didn't seem a bit like himself!'

As she trudged to and fro at her labour she began to speculate. She was much

worried. She surmised in a vague way that he was a sufferer from a great internal disease. It was something, no doubt, that devoured the kidneys or quietly fed upon the lungs. Later, she imagined a woman, wicked and fair, who had fascinated him, and was turning his life into a bitter thing. Her mind created many wondrous influences that were swooping like green dragons at him. They were changing him to a morose man, who suffered silently. She longed to discover them, that she might go bravely to the rescue of her heroic son. She knew that he, generous in his pain, would keep it from her. She racked her mind for knowledge.

However, when he came home at night he was extraordinarily blithe. He seemed to be a lad of ten. He capered all about

the room. When she was bringing the coffee-pot from the stove to the table he made show of waltzing with her, so that she spilled some of the coffee. She was obliged to scold him.

All through the meal he made jokes. She occasionally was compelled to laugh, despite the fact that she believed that she should not laugh at her own son's jokes. She uttered reproofs at times, but he did not regard them.

'Golly,' he said once, 'I feel fine as silk. I didn't think I'd get over feelin' bad so quick. It——' He stopped abruptly.

During the evening he sat content. He smoked his pipe and read from an evening paper. She bustled about at her work. She seemed utterly happy with him there, lazily puffing out little clouds of smoke

and giving frequent brilliant dissertations upon the news of the day. It seemed to her that she must be a model mother to have such a son, one who came home to her at night and sat contented, in a languor of the muscles after a good day's toil. She pondered upon the science of her management.

The week thereafter, too, she was joyous, for he stayed at home each night of it, and was sunny-tempered. She became convinced that she was a perfect mother, rearing a perfect son. There came often a lovelight into her eyes. The wrinkled, yellow face frequently warmed into a smile of the kind that a maiden bestows upon him who to her is first and perhaps last.

VI.

THE little old woman habitually discouraged all outbursts of youthful vanity on the part of her son. She feared that he would get to think too much of himself, and she knew that nothing could do more harm. Great self-esteem was always passive, she thought, and if he grew to regard his qualities of mind as forming a dazzling constellation, he would tranquilly sit still and not do those wonders she expected of him. So she was constantly on the alert to suppress even a shadow of such a thing.

As for him, he ruminated with the savage, vengeful bitterness of a young man, and decided that she did not comprehend him.

But, despite her precautions, he often saw that she believed him to be the most marvellous young man on the earth. He had only to look at those two eyes that became lighted with a glow from her heart whenever he did some excessively brilliant thing. On these occasions he could see her glance triumphantly at a neighbour, or whoever happened to be present. He grew to plan for these glances. And then he took a vast satisfaction in detecting and appropriating them.

Nevertheless, he could not understand why, directly after a scene of this kind, his mother was liable to call to him to

hang his coat on the hook under the mantel, her voice in a key of despair, as if he were negligent and stupid in what was, after all, the only important thing in life.

‘If yeh’ll only get in the habit of doin’ it, it’ll be jest as easy as throwin’ it down anywheres,’ she would say to him. ‘When ye pitch it down anywheres, somebody’s got t’ pick it up, an’ that’ll most likely be your poor ol’ mother. Yeh can hang it up yerself, if yeh’ll on’y think.’ This was intolerable. He usually went then and hurled his coat savagely at the hook. The correctness of her position was maddening.

It seemed to him that anyone who had a son of his glowing attributes should overlook the fact that he seldom hung up

his coat. It was impossible to explain this situation to his mother. She was unutterably narrow. He grew sullen.

There came a time, too, that, even in all his mother's tremendous admiration for him, he did not entirely agree with her. He was delighted that she liked his great wit. He spurred himself to new and flashing effort because of this appreciation.

But for the greater part he could see that his mother took pride in him in quite a different way from that in which he took pride in himself. She rejoiced at qualities in him that indicated that he was going to become a white and looming king among men. From these she made pictures, in which he appeared as a benign personage, blessed by the filled hands of the poor—

one whose brain could hold massive thoughts, and awe certain men about whom she had read. She was fêted as the mother of this enormous man. These dreams were her solace. She spoke of them to no one, because she knew that, worded, they would be ridiculous. But she dwelt with them, and they shed a radiance of gold upon her long days, her sorry labour. Upon the dead altars of her life she had builded the little fires of hope for another.

Kelcey had a complete sympathy for as much as he understood of these thoughts of his mother. They were so wise that he admired her foresight. As for himself, however, most of his dreams were of a nearer time. He had many of the distant future when he would be a man with a

cloak of coldness concealing his gentleness and his faults, and of whom the men, and more particularly the women, would think with reverence. He agreed with his mother that at that time he would go through what were obstacles to other men, like a flung stone. And then he would have power, and he would enjoy having his bounty and his wrath alike fall swiftly upon those below. They would be awed. And, above all, he would mystify them.

But then his nearer dreams were a multitude. He had begun to look at the great world revolving near to his nose. He had a vast curiosity concerning this city in whose complexities he was buried. It was an impenetrable mystery, this city. It was a blend of many enticing colours.

He longed to comprehend it completely, that he might walk understandingly in its greatest marvels, its mightiest march of life, of sin. He dreamed of a comprehension whose pay was the admirable attitude of a man of knowledge. He remembered Jones. He could not help admiring a man who knew so many bartenders.

VII.

AN indefinite woman was in all of Kelcey's dreams. As a matter of fact, it was not himself he pictured as wedding her. It was a vision of a man, greater, finer, more terrible. It was himself as he expected to be. In scenes which he took mainly from pictures, this vision conducted a courtship, strutting, posing, and lying through a drama which was magnificent from glow of purple. In it he was icy, self-possessed; but she, the dream-girl, was consumed by wild, torrential passion. He went to the

length of having her display it before the people.

He saw them wonder at his tranquillity. It amazed them infinitely to see him remain cold before the glory of this peerless woman's love. She was to him as beseeching for affection as a pet animal, but still he controlled appearances, and none knew of his deep, abiding love. Some day, at the critical romantic time, he was going to divulge it. In these long dreams there were accessories of castle-like houses, wide lands, servants, horses, clothes.

They began somewhere in his childhood. When he ceased to see himself as a stern general pointing a sword at the nervous and abashed horizon, he became this sublime king of a vague woman's heart. Later, when he had read some

books, it all achieved clearer expression. He was told in them that there was a goddess in the world whose business it was to wait until he should exchange a glance with her. It became a creed, subtly powerful. It saved discomfort for him and for several women who flitted by him. He used her as a standard.

Often he saw the pathos of her long wait, but his faith did not falter. The world was obliged to turn gold in time. His life was to be fine and heroic, else he would not have been born. He believed that the commonplace lot was the sentence, the doom of certain people who did not know how to feel. His blood was a tender current of life. He thought that the usual should fall to others whose nerves were of lead.

Occasionally he wondered how fate was going to begin in making an enormous figure of him ; but he had no doubt of the result. A chariot of pink clouds was coming for him. His faith was his reason for existence. Meanwhile, he could dream of the indefinite woman and the fragrance of roses that came from her hair.

One day he met Maggie Johnson on the stairs. She had a can of beer in one hand and a brown-paper parcel under her arm. She glanced at him. He discovered that it would wither his heart to see another man signally successful in the smiles of her. And the glance that she gave him was so indifferent and so unresponsive to the sudden vivid admiration in his own eyes that he immediately concluded that she was magnificent in two ways.

As she came to the landing, the light from a window passed in a silver gleam over the girlish roundness of her cheek. It was a thing that he remembered.

He was silent for the most part at supper that night. He was particularly unkind when he did speak. His mother, observing him apprehensively, tried in vain to picture the new terrible catastrophe. She eventually concluded that he did not like the beef-stew. She put more salt in it.

He saw Maggie quite frequently after the meeting upon the stairs. He reconstructed his dreams and placed her in the full glory of that sun. The dream-woman, the goddess, pitched from her pedestal, lay prostrate, unheeded, save when he brought her forth to call her insipid and

childish in the presence of his new religion.

He was relatively happy sometimes when Maggie's mother would get drunk and make terrific uproars. He used then to sit in the dark and make scenes in which he rescued the girl from her hideous environment.

He laid clever plans by which he encountered her in the halls, at the door, on the street. When he succeeded in meeting her he was always overcome by the thought that the whole thing was obvious to her. He could feel the shame of it burn his face and neck.

To prove to her that she was mistaken he would turn away his head or regard her with a granite stare.

After a time he became impatient of the

distance between them. He saw looming princes who would aim to seize her. Hours of his leisure and certain hours of his labour he spent in contriving. The shade of this girl was with him continually. With her he builded his grand dramas so that he trod in clouds, the matters of his daily life obscured and softened by a mist.

He saw that he need only break down the slight conventional barriers, and she would soon discover his noble character. Sometimes he could see it all in his mind. It was very skilful ; but then his courage flew away at the supreme moment. Perhaps the whole affair was humorous to her. Perhaps she was watching his mental contortions. She might laugh. He felt that he would then die or kill her. He

could not approach the dread moment. He sank often from the threshold of knowledge. Directly after these occasions it was his habit to avoid her, to prove that she was a cipher to him.

He reflected that if he could only get a chance to rescue her from something, the whole tragedy would speedily unwind.

He met a young man in the halls one evening who said to him : ' Say, me frien', where d' d' Johnson birds live in, heh ? I can't fin' me feet in dis bloomin' joint. I been battin' round heh fer a half hour.'

' Two flights up,' said Kelcey stonily. He had felt a sudden quiver of his heart. The grandeur of the clothes, the fine worldly air, the experience, the self-reliance,

the courage that shone in the countenance of this other young man, made him suddenly sink to the depths of woe. He stood listening in the hall, flushing and ashamed of it, until he heard them coming downstairs together. He slunk away then. It would have been a horror to him if she had discovered him there. She might have felt sorry for him.

They were going out to a show, perhaps. That pig of the world in his embroidered cloak was going to dazzle her with splendour. He mused upon how unrighteous it was for other men to dazzle women with splendour.

As he appreciated his handicap, he swore with savage, vengeful bitterness. In his home his mother raised her voice in a high key of monotonous irritability.

‘ Hang up yer coat, cant yeh, George ?’ she cried at him ; ‘ I can’t go round after yeh all th’ time. It’s jest as easy t’ hang it up as it is t’ throw it down that way. Don’t yeh ever git tired ’a hearing me yell at yeh ?’

‘ Yes !’ he exploded. In this word he put a profundity of sudden anger. He turned toward his mother a face red, seamed, hard with hate and rage. They stared a moment in silence. Then she turned and staggered toward her room. Her hip struck violently against the corner of the table during this blind passage. A moment later the door closed.

Kelcey sank down in a chair with his legs thrust out straight and his hands deep in his trousers - pockets. His chin was

forward upon his breast, and his eyes stared before him. There swept over him all the self-pity that comes when the soul is turned back from a road.

VIII.

DURING the next few days Kelcey suffered from his first gloomy conviction that the earth was not grateful to him for his presence upon it. When sharp words were said to him, he interpreted them with what seemed to be a lately acquired insight. He could now perceive that the universe hated him. He sank to the most sublime depths of despair.

One evening of this period he met Jones. The latter rushed upon him with enthusiasm.

'Why, yer jest th' man I wanted t' see! I was comin' round t' your place t'-night. Lucky I met yeh! Ol' Bleecker's goin' t' give a blow-out t'-morrain night. Anything yeh want t' drink! All th' boys'll be there, an' everything. He tol' me expressly that he wanted yeh t' be there. Great time! Great! Can yeh come?'

Kelcey grasped the other's hand with fervour. He felt now that there was some solacing friendship in space.

'You bet I will, ol' man,' he said huskily. 'I'd like nothin' better in th' world!'

As he walked home he thought that he was a very grim figure. He was about to taste the delicious revenge of a partial self - destruction. The universe would

regret its position when it saw him drunk. He was a little late in getting to Bleecker's lodging. He was delayed while his mother read aloud a letter from an old uncle, who wrote in one place : 'God bless th' boy ! Bring him up to be the man his father was.'

Bleecker lived in an old three-storied house on a side-street. A Jewish tailor lived and worked in the front parlour, and old Bleecker lived in the back parlour. A German, whose family took care of the house, occupied the basement. Another German, with a wife and eight children, rented the dining-room. The two upper floors were inhabited by tailors, dress-makers, a pedlar, and mysterious people who were seldom seen. The door of the little hall-bedroom, at the foot of the

second flight, was always open, and in there could be seen two bended men who worked at mending opera-glasses.

The German woman in the dining-room was not friends with the little dressmaker in the rear room of the third floor, and frequently they yelled the vilest names up and down between the balusters. Each part of the woodwork was scratched and rubbed by the contact of innumerable persons. In one wall there was a long slit with chipped edges, celebrating the time when a man had thrown a hatchet at his wife. In the lower hall there was an eternal woman, with a rag and a pail of suds, who knelt over the worn oilcloth. Old Bleecker felt that he had quite respectable and high-class apartments. He was glad to invite his friends.

Bleecker met Kelcey in the hall. He wore a collar that was cleaner and higher than his usual one. It changed his appearance greatly. He was now formidably aristocratic.

‘How are yeh, ol’ man?’ he shouted. He grasped Kelcey’s arm, and, babbling jovially, conducted him down the hall and into the ex-parlour.

A group of standing men made vast shadows in the yellow glare of the lamp. They turned their heads as the two entered.

‘Why, hello, Kelcey, ol’ man!’ Jones exclaimed, coming rapidly forward. ‘Good fer you! Glad yeh come! Yeh know O’Connor, ’a course! an’ Schmidt! an’ Woods! Then there’s Zeusentell! Mr. Zeusentell—my friend Mr. Kelcey! Shake

hands — both good fellows, damnitall !
Then here is—oh, gentlemen, my friend
Mr. Kelcey ! A good fellow he is, too.
I've known 'im since I was a kid. Come,
have a drink !'

Everybody was excessively amiable.
Kelcey felt that he had social standing.
The strangers were cautious and respectful.

'By all means,' said old Bleecker. 'Mr.
Kelcey, have a drink ! An' by th' way,
gentlemen, while we're about it, let's all
have a drink !' There was much laughter.
Bleecker was so droll at times.

With mild and polite gesturing they
marched up to the table. There were
upon it a keg of beer, a long row of
whisky bottles, a little heap of corn-cob
pipes, some bags of tobacco, a box of

cigars, and a mighty collection of glasses, cups, and mugs. Old Bleecker had arranged them so deftly that they resembled a primitive bar. There was considerable scuffling for possession of the cracked cups.

Jones politely but vehemently insisted upon drinking from the worst of the assortment. He was quietly opposed by others. Everybody showed that they were awed by Bleecker's lavish hospitality. Their demeanours expressed their admiration at the cast of this entertainment.

Kelcey took his second mug of beer away to a corner and sat down with it. He wished to socially reconnoitre. Over in a corner a man was telling a story, in which at intervals he grunted like a pig. A half-dozen men were listening. Two or

three others sat alone in isolated places. They looked expectantly bright, ready to burst out cordially if anyone should address them.

The row of bottles made quaint shadows upon the table, and upon a side-wall the keg of beer created a portentous black figure that reared toward the ceiling, hovering over the room and its inmates with spectral stature. Tobacco-smoke lay in lazy cloud-banks overhead.

Jones and O'Connor stayed near the table, occasionally being affable in all directions. Kelcey saw old Bleecker go to them, and heard him whisper :

'Come, we must git th' thing started. Git th' thing started.'

Kelcey saw that the host was fearing that all were not having a good time.

Jones conferred with O'Connor, and then O'Connor went to the man named Zeusentell. O'Connor evidently proposed something. Zeusentell refused at once. O'Connor beseeched. Zeusentell remained implacable.

At last O'Connor broke off his argument, and going to the centre of the room, held up his hand.

'Gentlemen!' he shouted loudly, 'we will now have a recitation by Mr. Zeusentell, entitled "Patrick Clancy's Pig!" He then glanced triumphantly at Zeusentell and said: 'Come on!'

Zeusentell had been twisting and making pantomimic appeals. He said in a reproachful whisper:

'You son of a gun!'

The men turned their heads to glance at

Zeusentell for a moment, and then burst into a sustained clamour.

‘Hurray! Let ’er go! Come—give it t’ us! Spring it! Spring it! Let it come!’

As Zeusentell made no advances, they appealed personally.

‘Come, ol’ man, let ’er go! Whatter yeh ’fraid of? Let ’er go! Go ahn! Hurry up!’

Zeusentell was protesting with almost frantic modesty. O’Connor took him by the lapel and tried to drag him; but he leaned back, pulling at his coat and shaking his head.

‘No, no! I don’t know it, I tell yeh! I can’t! I don’t know it! I tell yeh I don’t know it! I’ve forgotten it, I tell yeh! No—no—no—no! Ah, say, lookahere, le’

go me, can't yeh? What's th' matter with yeh? I tell yeh I don't know it!

The men applauded violently. O'Connor did not relent. A little battle was waged until all of a sudden Zeusentell was seen to grow wondrously solemn. A hush fell upon the men. He was about to begin. He paused in the middle of the floor and nervously adjusted his collar and cravat. The audience became grave.

“Patrick Clancy's Pig,” announced Zeusentell in a shrill, dry, unnatural tone. And then he began in a rapid sing-song :

“Patrick Clancy had a pig
Th' pride uv all th' nation,
The half uv him was half as big
As half uv all creation——”

When he concluded the others looked at each other to convey their appreciation.

They then wildly clapped their hands or tinkled their glasses. As Zeusentell went toward his seat a man leaned over and asked :

‘ Can yeh tell me where I kin git that ?’

He had made a great success. After an enormous pressure he was induced to recite two more tales. Old Bleecker finally led him forward and pledged him in a large drink. He declared that they were the best things he had ever heard.

The efforts of Zeusentell imparted a gaiety to the company. The men having laughed together were better acquainted, and there was now a universal topic. Some of the party, too, began to be quite drunk.

The invaluable O'Connor brought forth a man who could play the mouth-organ.

The latter, after wiping his instrument upon his coat-sleeve, played all the popular airs. The men's heads swayed to and fro in the clouded smoke. They grinned and beat time with their feet. A valour, barbaric and wild, began to show in their poses and in their faces, red and glistening from perspiration.

The conversation resounded in a hoarse roar. The beer would not run rapidly enough for Jones, so he remained behind to tilt the keg. This caused the black shadow on the wall to retreat and advance, sinking mystically, to loom forward again with sudden menace—a huge dark figure, controlled as by some unknown emotion. The glasses, mugs, and cups travelled swift and regular, catching orange reflections from the lamp-light. Two or

three men were grown so careless that they were continually spilling their drinks. Old Bleecker, cackling with pleasure, seized time to glance triumphantly at Jones. His party was going to be a success.

IX.

OF a sudden Kelcey felt the buoyant thought that he was having a good time. He was all at once an enthusiast, as if he were at a festival of a religion. He felt that there was something fine and thrilling in this affair, isolated from a stern world, and from which the laughter arose like incense. He knew that old sentiment of brotherly regard for those about him. He began to converse tenderly with them.

He was not sure of his drift of thought,

but he knew that he was immensely sympathetic. He rejoiced at their faces, shining red and wrinkled with smiles. He was capable of heroisms.

His pipe irritated him by going out frequently. He was too busy in amiable conversations to attend to it. When he arose to go for a match he discovered that his legs were a trifle uncertain under him. They bended, and did not precisely obey his intent.

At the table he lit a match, and then, in laughing at a joke made near him, forgot to apply it to the bowl of his pipe. He succeeded with the next match, after annoying trouble. He swayed so that the match would appear first on one side of the bowl and then on the other. At last he happily got it directly over the tobacco.

He had burned his fingers. He inspected them, laughing vaguely.

Jones came and slapped him on the shoulder.

‘Well, ol’ man, let’s take a drink fer ol’ Handyville’s sake!’

Kelcey was deeply affected. He looked at Jones with moist eyes.

‘I’ll go yeh,’ he said.

With an air of profound melancholy, Jones poured out some whisky. They drank reverently. They exchanged a glistening look of tender recollections, and then went over to where Bleecker was telling a humorous story to a circle of giggling listeners. The old man sat like a fat, jolly god.

‘And just at that moment th’ old woman put her head out of th’ window an’ said :

"Mike, yez lezy divil, fer phwat do yez be slapin' in me new geranium bid?" An' Mike woke up an' said: "Domn a wash-woman thot do niver wash her own bid-clues. Here do I be slapin' in nothin' but dhirt an' wades." "

The men slapped their knees, roaring loudly. They begged him to tell another. A clamour of comment arose concerning the anecdote, so that when old Bleecker began a fresh one nobody was heeding.

It occurred to Jones to sing. Suddenly he burst forth with a ballad that had a rippling waltz movement, and, seizing Kelcey, made a furious attempt to dance. They sprawled over a pair of outstretched legs and pitched headlong. Kelcey fell with a yellow crash. Blinding lights flashed before his vision, but he arose

immediately, laughing. He did not feel at all hurt. The pain in his head was rather pleasant.

Old Bleecker, O'Connor, and Jones, who now limped and drew breath through his teeth, were about to lead him with much care and tenderness to the table for another drink, but he laughingly pushed them away and went unassisted. Bleecker told him : ' Great Gawd, your head struck hard enough t' break a trunk.'

He laughed again, and with a show of steadiness and courage he poured out an extravagant portion of whisky. With cold muscles he put it to his lips and drank it. It chanced that this addition dazed him like a powerful blow. A moment later it affected him, with blinding and numbing power.

Suddenly unbalanced, he felt the room sway. His blurred sight could only distinguish a tumbled mass of shadow through which the beams from the light ran like swords of flame. The sound of the many voices was to him like the roar of a distant river.

Still, he felt that if he could only annul the force of these million winding figures that gripped his senses, he was capable of most brilliant and entertaining things.

He was at first of the conviction that his feelings were only temporary. He waited for them to pass away, but the mental and physical pause only caused a new reeling and swinging of the room. Chasms with inclined approaches were before him; peaks leaned toward him. And withal he was blind and numb with

surprise. He understood vaguely in his stupefaction that it would disgrace him to fall down a chasm.

At last he perceived a shadow, a form, which he knew to be Jones. The adorable Jones, the supremely wise Jones, was walking in this strange land without fear or care, erect and tranquil. Kelcey murmured in admiration and affection, and fell toward his friend. Jones's voice sounded as from the shores of the unknown.

'Come, come, ol' man, this will never do. Brace up.'

It appeared after all that Jones was not wholly wise.

'Oh, I'm—all ri', Jones! I'm all ri'! I wan' shing song! Tha's all—I wan' shing song!'

Jones was stupid.

'Come, now, sit down an' shut up.'

It made Kelcey burn with fury.

'Jones, le' me alone, I tell yeh! Le' me alone! I wan' shing song er te' story! G'l'm'n, I lovsh girl live down my shtreet. Thash reason 'm drunk—'tis! She——'

Jones seized him and dragged him toward a chair. He heard him laugh. He could not endure these insults from his friend. He felt a blazing desire to strangle his companion.

He threw out his hand violently, but Jones grappled him close, and he was no more than a dried leaf. He was amazed to find that Jones possessed the strength of twenty horses. He was forced skilfully to the floor.

As he lay he reflected in great astonishment upon Jones's muscle. It was singular

that he had never before discovered it. The whole incident had impressed him immensely. An idea struck him that he might denounce Jones for it. It would be a sage thing. There would be a thrilling and dramatic moment in which he would dazzle all the others.

But at this moment he was assailed by a mighty desire to sleep. Sombre and soothing clouds of slumber were heavily upon him. He closed his eyes with a sigh that was yet like that of a babe.

When he awoke there was still the battleful clamour of the revel. He half arose, with a plan of participating, when O'Connor came and pushed him down again, throwing out his chin in affectionate remonstrance, and saying, 'Now, now!' as to a child.

The change that had come over these men mystified Kelcey in a great degree. He had never seen anything so vastly stupid as their idea of his state. He resolved to prove to them that they were dealing with one whose mind was very clear.

He kicked and squirmed in O'Connor's arms, until, with a final wrench, he scrambled to his feet and stood tottering in the middle of the room. He would let them see that he had a strangely lucid grasp of events.

'G'l'm'n, I lovsh girl! I ain' drunker'n yeh all are! She——'

He felt them hurl him to a corner of the room and pile chairs and tables upon him until he was buried beneath a stupendous mountain. Far above, as up

a mine's shaft, there were voices, lights, and vague figures. He was not hurt physically, but his feelings were unutterably injured.

He, the brilliant, the good, the sympathetic, had been thrust fiendishly from the party. They had had the comprehension of red lobsters. It was an unspeakable barbarism. Tears welled piteously from his eyes. He planned long diabolical explanations!

X.

AT first the gray lights of dawn came timidly into the room, remaining near the windows, afraid to approach certain sinister corners. Finally, mellow streams of sunshine poured in, undraping the shadows to disclose the putrefaction, making pitiless revelation. Kelcey awoke with a groan of undirected misery. He tossed his stiffened arms about his head for a moment, and then, leaning heavily upon his elbow, stared blinking at his environment. The grim truthfulness of the day

showed disaster and death. After the tumults of the previous night the interior of this room resembled a decaying battle-field. The air hung heavy and stifling with the odours of tobacco, men's breaths, and beer half filling forgotten glasses. There was ruck of broken tumblers, pipes, bottles, spilled tobacco, cigar stumps. The chairs and tables were pitched this way and that way, as after some terrible struggle. In the midst of it all lay old Bleecker, stretched upon a couch in deepest sleep, as abandoned in attitude, as motionless, as ghastly, as if it were a corpse that had been flung there.

A knowledge of the thing came gradually into Kelcey's eyes. He looked about him with an expression of utter woe, regret, and loathing. He was compelled to lie

down again. A pain above his eyebrows was like that from an iron clamp.

As he lay pondering, his bodily condition created for him a bitter philosophy, and he perceived all the futility of a red existence. He saw his life-problems confronting him like granite giants, and he was no longer erect to meet them. He had made a calamitous retrogression in his war. Spectres were to him now as large as clouds.

Inspired by the pitiless ache in his head, he was prepared to reform and live a white life. His stomach informed him that a good man was the only being who was wise. But his perception of his future was hopeless. He was aghast at the prospect of the old routine. It was impossible. He trembled before its exactions.

Turning toward the other way, he saw that the gold portals of vice no longer enticed him. He could not hear the strains of alluring music. The beckoning sirens of drink had been killed by this pain in his head. The desires of his life suddenly lay dead, like mullein stalks. Upon reflection, he saw, therefore, that he was perfectly willing to be virtuous if somebody would come and make it easy for him.

When he stared over at old Bleecker, he felt a sudden contempt and dislike for him. He considered him to be a tottering old beast. It was disgusting to perceive aged men so weak in sin. He dreaded to see him awaken, lest he should be required to be somewhat civil to him.

Kelcey wished for a drink of water. For some time he had dreamed of the liquid, deliciously cool. It was an abstract, uncontained thing that poured upon him and tumbled him, taking away his pain like a kind of surgery. He arose and staggered slowly toward a little sink in a corner of the room. He understood that any rapid movement might cause his head to split.

The little sink was filled with a chaos of broken glass and spilled liquids. A sight of it filled him with horror, but he rinsed a glass with scrupulous care, and, filling it, took an enormous drink. The water was an intolerable disappointment. It was insipid and weak to his scorched throat, and not at all cool. He put down the glass with a gesture of despair. His face became

fixed in the stony and sullen expression of a man who waits for the recuperative power of morrows.

Old Bleecker awakened. He rolled over and groaned loudly. For awhile he thrashed about in a fury of displeasure at his bodily stiffness and pain. Kelcey watched him as he would have watched a death agony.

‘Good Gawd!’ said the old man, ‘beer an’ whisky make th’ devil of a mix! Did yeh see th’ fight?’

‘No,’ said Kelcey stolidly.

‘Why, Zeusentell an’ O’Connor had a great old mill. They were scrappin’ all over th’ place. I thought we were all goin’ t’ get pulled. Thompson, that fellah over in th’ corner, though, he sat down on th’ whole business. He was a dandy! He

had t' poke Zeusentell! He was a bird! Lord, I wish I had a Manhattan!

Kelcey remained in bitter silence while old Bleecker dressed. 'Come an' get a cocktail,' said the latter briskly. This was part of his aristocracy. He was the only man of them who knew much about cocktails. He perpetually referred to them. 'It'll brace yeh right up! Come along! Say, you get full too soon. You oughter wait until later, me boy! You're too speedy!' Kelcey wondered vaguely where his companion had lost his zeal for polished sentences, his iridescent mannerisms.

'Come along,' said Bleecker.

Kelcey made a movement of disdain for cocktails, but he followed the other to the street. At the corner they separated. Kelcey attempted a friendly parting smile

and then went on up the street. He had to reflect to know that he was erect and using his own muscles in walking. He felt like a man of paper, blown by the winds. Withal, the dust of the avenue was galling to his throat, eyes and nostrils, and the roar of traffic cracked his head. He was glad, however, to be alone, to be rid of old Bleecker. The sight of him had been as the contemplation of a disease.

His mother was not at home. In his little room he mechanically undressed and bathed his head, arms and shoulders. When he crawled between the two white sheets he felt a first lifting of his misery. His pillow was soothingly soft. There was an effect that was like the music of tender voices.

When he awoke again his mother was

bending over him giving vent to alternate cries of grief and joy. Her hands trembled so that they were useless to her. 'Oh, George, George, where have yeh been? What has happened t' yeh? Oh, George, I've been so worried! I didn't sleep a wink all night!'

Kelcey was instantly wide awake. With a moan of suffering he turned his face to the wall before he spoke. 'Never mind, mother, I'm all right. Don't fret now! I was knocked down by a truck last night in th' street, an' they took me t' th' hospital; but it's all right now. I got out jest a little while ago. They told me I'd better go home an' rest up.'

His mother screamed in pity, horror, joy and self-reproach for something unknown. She frenziedly demanded the

details. He sighed with unutterable weariness. 'Oh—wait—wait—wait!' he said, shutting his eyes as from the merciless monotony of a pain. 'Wait—wait—please wait! I can't talk now. I want t' rest.'

His mother condemned herself with a little cry. She adjusted his pillow, her hands shaking with love and tenderness.

'There, there, don't mind, dearie! But yeh can't think how worried I was—an' crazy. I was near frantic. I went down t' th' shop, an' they said they hadn't seen anything 'a yeh there. The foreman was awful good t' me. He said he'd come up this atternoon t' see if yeh had come home yet. He tol' me not t' worry. Are yeh sure yer all right? Ain't there anythin'

I kin git fer yeh? What did th' doctor say?'

Kelcey's patience was worn. He gestured, and then spoke querulously. 'Now—now—mother, it's all right, I tell yeh! All I need is a little rest, an' I'll be as well as ever. But it makes it all th' worse if yeh stand there an' ask me questions an' make me think. Jest leave me alone fer a little while, an' I'll be as well as ever. Can't yeh do that?'

The little old woman puckered her lips funnily. 'My, what an old bear th' boy is!' She kissed him blithely. Presently she went out, upon her face a bright and glad smile that must have been a reminiscence of some charming girlhood.

XI.

AT one time Kelcey had a friend who was struck in the head by the pole of a truck and knocked senseless. He was taken to the hospital, from which he emerged in the morning an astonished man, with rather a dim recollection of the accident. He used to hold an old brierwood pipe in his teeth in a manner peculiar to himself, and, with a brown derby hat tilted back on his head, recount his strange sensations. Kelcey had always remembered it as a bit of curious history. When his

mother cross-examined him in regard to the accident, he told this story with barely a variation. Its truthfulness was incontestable.

At the shop he was welcomed on the following day with considerable enthusiasm. The foreman had told the story, and there were already jokes created concerning it. Mike O'Donnell, whose wit was famous, had planned a humorous campaign, in which he made charges against Kelcey which were, as a matter of fact, almost the exact truth. Upon hearing it, Kelcey looked at him suddenly from the corners of his eyes, but otherwise remained imperturbable. O'Donnell eventually despaired. 'Yez can't goiy that kid! He tekes ut all loike mate an' dhrink.' Kelcey often told the story, his pipe held in his

teeth peculiarly, and his derby tilted back on his head.

He remained at home for several evenings, content to read the papers and talk with his mother. She began to look around for the tremendous reason for it. She suspected that his nearness to death in the recent accident had sobered his senses and made him think of high things. She mused upon it continually. When he sat moodily pondering she watched him. She said to herself that she saw the light breaking in upon his spirit. She felt that it was a very critical period of his existence. She resolved to use all her power and skill to turn his eyes toward the lights in the sky. Accordingly, she addressed him one evening :

‘Come, go t’ prayer-meetin’ t’-night

with me, will yeh, George?' It sounded more blunt than she intended.

He glanced at her in sudden surprise. 'Huh?'

As she repeated her request, her voice quavered. She felt that it was a supreme moment.

'Come, go t' prayer-meetin' t'-night, won't yeh?'

He seemed amazed.

'Oh, I don't know,' he began. He was fumbling in his mind for a reason for refusing. 'I don't wanta go. I'm tired as the dickens!'

His obedient shoulders sank down languidly. His head mildly drooped.

The little old woman, with a quick perception of her helplessness, felt a motherly rage at her son. It was intolerable that

she could not impart motion to him in a chosen direction. The waves of her desires were puny against the rocks of his indolence. She had a great wish to beat him.

‘I don’t know what I’m ever goin’ t’ do with yeh,’ she told him in a choking voice. ‘Yeh won’t do anything I ask yeh to. Yeh never pay th’ least bit ’a attention t’ what I say. Yeh don’t mind me any more than yeh would a fly. Whatever am I goin’ t’ do with yeh?’

She faced him in a battleful way, her eyes blazing with a sombre light of despairing rage.

He looked up at her ironically. ‘I don’t know,’ he said, with calmness. ‘What are yeh?’ He had traced her emotions and seen her fear of his rebellion. He thrust

out his legs in the easy scorn of a rapier-bravo. 'What are yeh?'

The little old woman began to weep. They were tears without a shame of grief. She allowed them to run unheeded down her cheeks. As she stared into space her son saw her regarding there the powers and influences that she had held in her younger life. She was in some way acknowledging to fate that she was now but withered grass, with no power but the power to feel the winds. He was smitten with a sudden shame. Besides, in the last few days he had gained quite a character for amiability. He saw something grand in relenting at this point. 'Well,' he said, trying to remove a sulky quality from his voice, 'well, if yer bound t' have me go, I s'pose I'll have t' go.'

His mother, with strange, immobile face, went to him and kissed him on the brow. 'All right, George!' There was in her wet eyes an emotion which he could not fathom.

She put on her bonnet and shawl, and they went out together. She was unusually silent, and made him wonder why she did not appear gleeful at his coming. He was resentful because she did not display more appreciation of his sacrifice. Several times he thought of halting and refusing to go further, to see if that would not wring from her some acknowledgment.

In a dark street the little chapel sat humbly between two towering apartment-houses. A red street-lamp stood in front. It threw a marvellous reflection upon the wet pavements. It was like the death-

stain of a spirit. Further up the brilliant lights of an avenue made a span of gold across the black street. A roar of wheels and a clang of bells came from this point, interwoven into a sound emblematic of the life of the city. It seemed somehow to affront this solemn and austere little edifice. It suggested an approaching barbaric invasion. The little church, pierced, would die with a fine, illimitable scorn for its slayers.

When Kelcey entered with his mother he felt a sudden quaking. His knees shook. It was an awesome place to him. There was a menace in the red padded carpet and the leather doors, studded with little brass tacks that penetrated his soul with their pitiless glances. As for his mother, she had acquired such a new air

that he would have been afraid to address her. He felt completely alone and isolated at this formidable time.

There was a man in the vestibule who looked at them blandly. From within came the sound of singing. To Kelcey there were a million voices. He dreaded the terrible moment when the doors should swing back. He wished to recoil, but at that instant the bland man pushed the doors aside, and he followed his mother up the centre aisle of the little chapel. To him there was a riot of lights that made him transparent. The multitudinous pairs of eyes that turned toward him were implacable in their cool valuations.

They had just ceased singing. He who conducted the meeting motioned that the service should wait until the new-comers

found seats. The little old woman went slowly on toward the first rows. Occasionally she paused to scrutinize vacant places, but they did not seem to meet her requirements. Kelcey was in agony. He thought the moment of her decision would never come. In his unspeakable haste he walked a little faster than his mother.

Once she paused to glance in her calculating way at some seats and he forged ahead. He halted abruptly and returned, but by that time she had resumed her thoughtful march up the aisle. He could have assassinated her. He felt that everybody must have seen his torture, during which his hands were to him like monstrous swollen hides. He was wild with a rage in which his lips turned slightly

livid. He was capable of doing some furious, unholy thing.

When the little old woman at last took a seat, her son sat down beside her slowly and stiffly. He was opposing his strong desire to drop.

When from the mists of his shame and humiliation the scene came before his vision, he was surprised to find that all eyes were not fastened upon his face. The leader of the meeting seemed to be the only one who saw him. He stared gravely, solemnly, regretfully. He was a pale-faced but plump young man in a black coat that buttoned to his chin. It was evident to Kelcey that his mother had spoken of him to the young clergyman, and that the latter was now impressing upon him the sorrow caused by the con-

temptation of his sin. Kelcey hated the man.

A man seated alone over in a corner began to sing. He closed his eyes and threw back his head. Others, scattered sparsely throughout the innumerable light-wood chairs, joined him as they caught the air.

Kelcey heard his mother's frail, squeaking soprano. The chandelier in the centre was the only one lighted, and far at the end of the room one could discern the pulpit swathed in gloom, solemn and mystic as a bier. It was surrounded by vague shapes of darkness on which at times was the glint of brass, or of glass that shone like steel, until one could feel there the presence of the army of the unknown, possessors of the great eternal truths, and

silent listeners at this ceremony. High up, the stained glass windows loomed in leaden array like dull-hued banners, merely catching occasional splashes of dark wine-colour from the lights. Kelcey fell to brooding concerning this indefinable presence which he felt in a church.

One by one people arose and told little tales of their religious faith. Some were tearful, and others calm, emotionless, and convincing.

Kelcey listened closely for a time. These people filled him with a great curiosity. He was not familiar with their types.

At last the young clergyman spoke at some length.

Kelcey was amazed, because, from the young man's appearance, he would

not have suspected him of being so glib ; but the speech had no effect on Kelcey, excepting to prove to him again that he was damned.

XII.

KELCEY sometimes wondered whether he liked beer. He had been obliged to cultivate a talent for imbibing it. He was born with an abhorrence which he had steadily battled until it had come to pass that he could drink from ten to twenty glasses of beer without the act of swallowing causing him to shiver. He understood that drink was an essential to joy, to the coveted position of a man of the world and of the streets. The saloons contained the mystery of a street for him. When he

knew its saloons he comprehended the street.

Drink and its surroundings were the eyes of a superb green dragon to him. He followed a fascinating glitter, and the glitter required no explanation.

Directly after old Bleecker's party he almost reformed. He was tired and worn from the tumult of it, and he saw it as one might see a skeleton emerged from a crimson cloak. He wished then to turn his face away.

Gradually, however, he recovered his mental balance. Then he admitted again by his point of view that the thing was not so terrible. His headache had caused him to exaggerate. A 'drunk' was not the blight which he had once remorsefully named it. On the con-

trary, it was a mere unpleasant incident. He resolved, however, to be more cautious.

When prayer-meeting night came again his mother approached him hopefully. She smiled like one whose request is already granted.

‘Well, will yeh go t’ prayer-meetin’ with me t’-night again?’

He turned toward her with eloquent suddenness, and then riveted his eyes upon a corner of the floor.

‘Well, I guess not,’ he said.

His mother tearfully tried to comprehend his state of mind.

‘What has come over yeh?’ she said tremblingly. ‘Yeh never used t’ be this way, George. Yeh never used t’ be so cross an’ mean t’ me——’

'Oh, I ain't cross an' mean t' yeh,' he interpolated, exasperated and violent.

'Yes, yeh are, too! I ain't hardly had a decent word from yeh in ever so long. Yer as cross an' as mean as yeh can be. I don't know what t' make of it. It can't be'—there came a look in her eyes that told that she was going to shock and alarm him with her heaviest sentence—'it can't be that yeh've got t' drinkin'.'

Kelcey grunted with disgust at the ridiculous thing. 'Why, what an old goose yer gettin' t' be!'

She was compelled to laugh a little, as a child laughs between tears at a hurt. She had not been serious. She was only trying to display to him how she regarded his horrifying mental state. 'Oh, of course I didn't mean that, but I think yeh act jest

as bad as if yeh did drink. I wish yeh would do better, George !

She had grown so much less frigid and stern in her censure that Kelcey seized the opportunity to try to make a joke of it. He laughed at her, but she shook her head and continued : ' I do wish yeh would do better. I don't know what's t' become 'a yeh, George. Yeh don't mind what I say no more'n if I was th' wind in th' chimbley. Yeh don't care about nothin' 'cept goin out nights. I can't ever get yeh t' prayer-meetin' ner church ; yeh never go out with me anywheres unless yeh can't get out of it ; yeh swear an' take on sometimes like everything ; yeh never——'

He gestured wrathfully in interruption. ' Say, lookahere, can't yeh think 'a something I do ?'

She ended her oration then in the old way—‘An’ I don’t know what’s goin’ t’ become ’a yeh.’

She put on her bonnet and shawl and then came and stood near him expectantly. She imparted to her attitude a subtle threat of unchangeableness. He pretended to be engrossed in his newspaper. The little swaggering clock on the mantel became suddenly evident, ticking with loud monotony. Presently she said firmly, ‘Well, are yeh comin’?’

He was reading.

‘Well, are yeh comin’?’

He threw his paper down angrily. ‘Oh, why don’t yeh go on an’ leave me alone?’ he demanded in supreme impatience. ‘What do yeh wanta pester me fer? Ye’d think there was robbers. Why can’t yeh

go alone or else stay home? You wanta go, an' I don't wanta go, an' yeh keep all time tryin' t' drag me. Yeh know I don't wanta go.' He concluded in a last defiant wounding of her. 'What do I care 'bout those ol' bags-'a-wind, anyhow? They gimme a pain!'

His mother turned her face and went from him. He sat staring with a mechanical frown. Presently he went and picked up his newspaper.

Jones told him that night that everybody had had such a good time at old Bleecker's party that they were going to form a club. They waited at the little smiling saloon, and then, amid much enthusiasm, all signed a membership-roll. Old Bleecker, late that night, was violently elected president. He made speeches of

thanks and gratification during the remainder of the meeting. Kelcey went home rejoicing. He felt that at any rate he would have true friends. The dues were a dollar for each week.

He was deeply interested. For a number of evenings he fairly gobbled his supper in order that he might be off to the little smiling saloon to discuss the new organization. All the men were wildly enthusiastic. One night the saloon-keeper announced that he would donate half the rent of quite a large room over his saloon. It was an occasion for great cheering. Kelcey's legs were like whalebone when he tried to go upstairs upon his return home, and the edge of each step was moved curiously forward.

His mother's questions made him snarl.

‘ Oh, nowheres !’ At other times he would tell her, ‘ Oh, t’ see some friends ’a mine ! Where d’ yeh s’pose ?’

Finally, some of the women of the tenement concluded that the little old mother had a wild son. They came to condole with her. They sat in the kitchen for hours. She told them of his wit, his cleverness, his kind heart.

XIII.

AT a certain time Kelcey discovered that some young men who stood in the cinders between a brick wall and the pavement, and near the side-door of a corner saloon, knew more about life than other people. They used to lean there smoking and chewing, and comment upon events and persons. They knew the neighbourhood extremely well. They debated upon small typical things that transpired before them, until they had extracted all the information that existence contained. They sometimes

inaugurated little fights with foreigners or well-dressed men. It was here that Sapristi Glielmi, the pedlar, stabbed Pete Brady to death, for which he got a life-sentence. Each patron of the saloon was closely scrutinized as he entered the place.

Sometimes they used to throng upon the heels of a man, and in at the bar assert that he had asked them in to drink. When he objected, they would claim with one voice that it was too deep an insult, and gather about to thrash him. When they had caught chance customers and absolute strangers, the barkeeper had remained in stolid neutrality, ready to serve one or seven, but two or three times they had encountered the wrong men. Finally, the proprietor had come out one morning and

told them in the fearless way of his class that their pastime must cease.

‘ It quits right here ! See ? Right here ! Th’ nex’ time yeh try t’ work it, I come with th’ bung-starter, an’ th’ mugs I miss with it git pulled. See ? It quits !’ Infrequently, however, men did ask them in to drink.

The policeman of that beat grew dignified and shrewd whenever he approached this corner. Sometimes he stood with his hands behind his back and cautiously conversed with them. It was understood on both sides that it was a good thing to be civil.

In winter this band, a trifle diminished in numbers, huddled in their old coats and stamped little flat places in the snow, their faces turned always toward the changing

life in the streets. In the summer they became more lively. Sometimes, then, they walked out to the kerb to look up and down the street.

Over in a trampled vacant lot, surrounded by high tenement-houses, there was a sort of a den among some boulders. An old truck was made to form a shelter. The small hoodlums of that vicinity all avoided the spot—so many of them had been thrashed upon being caught near it. It was the summer-time lounging place of the band from the corner.

They were all too clever to work. Some of them had worked, but these used their experiences as stores from which to draw tales. They were like veterans with their wars. One lad in particular used to recount how he whipped his employer, the

proprietor of a large grain and feed establishment. He described his victim's features and form and clothes with minute exactness. He bragged of his wealth and social position. It had been a proud moment of the lad's life. He was like a savage who had killed a great chief.

Their feeling for contemporaneous life was one of contempt. Their philosophy taught that in a large part the whole thing was idle and a great bore. With fine scorn they sneered at the futility of it. Work was done by men who had not the courage to stand still and let the skies clap together if they willed.

The vast machinery of the popular law indicated to them that there were people in the world who wished to remain quiet. They awaited the moment when they

could prove to them that a riotous upheaval, a cloud-burst of destruction, would be a delicious thing. They thought of their fingers buried in the lives of these people. They longed dimly for a time when they could run through decorous streets with crash and roar of war, an army of revenge for pleasures long possessed by others, a wild sweeping compensation for their years without crystal and gilt, women and wine. This thought slumbered in them, as the image of Rome might have lain small in the hearts of the barbarians.

Kelcey respected these youths so much that he ordinarily used the other side of the street. He could not go near to them, because if a passer minded his own business he was a disdainful prig and had insulted them ; if he showed that he was

aware of them they were likely to resent his not minding his own business and prod him into a fight if the opportunity were good. Kelcey longed for their acquaintance and friendship, for with it came social safety and ease ; they were respected so universally.

Once, in another street, Fidsey Corcoran was whipped by a short, heavy man. Fidsey picked himself up, and in the fury of defeat hurled pieces of brick at his opponent. The short man dodged with skill, and then pursued Fidsey for over a block. Sometimes he got near enough to punch him. Fidsey raved in maniacal fury. The moment the short man would attempt to resume his own affairs, Fidsey would turn upon him again, tears and blood upon his face, with the lashed rage

of a vanquished animal. The short man used to turn about, swear madly, and make little dashes. Fidsey always ran, and then returned as pursuit ceased.

The short man apparently wondered if this maniac was ever going to allow him to finish whipping him. He looked helplessly up and down the street. People were there who knew Fidsey, and they remonstrated with him ; but he continued to confront the short man, gibbering like a wounded ape, using all the eloquence of the street in his wild oaths.

Finally, the short man was exasperated to black fury. He decided to end the fight. With low snarls, ominous as death, he plunged at Fidsey.

Kelcey happened there then. He grasped the short man's shoulder. He

cried out, in the peculiar whine of the man who interferes :

‘Oh, hol’ on! Yeh don’t wanta hit ’im any more! Yeh’ve done enough to ’im now! Leave ’im be!’

The short man wrenched and tugged. He turned his face until his teeth were almost at Kelcey’s cheek.

‘Le’ go me! Le’ go me, you——’

The rest of his sentence was screamed curses.

Kelcey’s face grew livid from fear, but he somehow managed to keep his grip. Fidsey, with but an instant’s pause, plunged into the new fray.

They beat the short man. They forced him against a high board-fence, where for a few seconds their blows sounded upon his head in swift thuds. A moment later

Fidsey descried a running policeman. He made off, fleet as a shadow. Kelcey noted his going. He ran after him.

Three or four blocks away they halted. Fidsey said :

‘I’d ’a licked dat big stuff in ’bout a minute more,’ and wiped the blood from his eyes.

At the gang’s corner they asked : ‘ Who soaked yeh, Fidsey ?’ His description was burning. Everybody laughed. ‘ Where is ’e now ?’

Later they began to question Kelcey. He recited a tale in which he allowed himself to appear prominent and redoubtable. They looked at him then as if they thought he might be quite a man.

Once when the little old woman was going out to buy something for her son’s

supper, she discovered him standing at the side-door of the saloon engaged intimately with Fidsey and the others. She slunk away, for she understood that it would be a terrible thing to confront him and his pride there with youths who were superior to mothers.

When he arrived home, he threw down his hat with a weary sigh, as if he had worked long hours, but she attacked him before he had time to complete the falsehood. He listened to her harangue with a curled lip. In defence he merely made a gesture of supreme exasperation. She never understood the advanced things in life. He felt the hopelessness of ever making her comprehend. His mother was not modern.

XIV.

THE little old woman arose early and bustled in the preparation of breakfast. At times she looked anxiously at the clock. An hour before her son should leave for work she went to his room, and called him in the usual tone of sharpness :

‘ George ! George !’

A sleepy growl came to her.

‘ Come, come, it’s time t’ git up,’ she continued. ‘ Come, now, git right up !’

Later she went again to the door.

‘ George, are yeh gittin’ up ?’

‘ Huh ?’

‘ Are yeh gittin’ up ?’

‘ Yes, I’ll git right up !’

He had introduced a valour into his voice which she detected to be false. She went to his bedside and took him by the shoulder.

‘ George—George—git up !’

From the mist-lands of sleep he began to protest incoherently. ‘ Oh le’ me be, won’ yeh ? ’M sleepy !’

She continued to shake him. ‘ Well, it’s time t’ git up. Come—come—come on, now !’

Her voice, shrill with annoyance, pierced his ears in a slender, piping thread of sound. He turned over on the pillow to bury his head in his arms. When he expostulated, his tones came half-smothered.

'Oh, le' me be, can't yeh? There's plenty 'a time! Jest fer ten minutes! 'M sleepy!'

She was implacable. 'No, yeh must git up now! Yeh ain't got more'n time enough t' eat yer breakfast an' git t' work.'

Eventually he arose, sullen and grumbling. Later he came to his breakfast, blinking his dry eyelids, his stiffened features set in a mechanical scowl.

Each morning his mother went to his room, and fought a battle to arouse him. She was like a soldier. Despite his pleadings, his threats, she remained at her post, imperturbable and unyielding.

These affairs assumed large proportions in his life. Sometimes he grew beside himself with a bland, unformulated wrath.

The whole thing was a consummate imposition. He felt that he was being cheated of his sleep. It was an injustice to compel him to arise morning after morning with bitter regularity, before the sleep-gods had at all loosened their grasp. He hated that unknown force which directed his life.

One morning he swore a tangled mass of oaths, aimed into the air, as if the injustice poised there. His mother flinched at first; then her mouth set in the little straight line. She saw that the momentous occasion had come. It was the time of the critical battle. She turned upon him valorously.

‘Stop your swearin’, George Kelcey; I won’t have yeh talk so before me! I won’t have it! Stop this minute! Not

another word! Do yeh think I'll allow yeh t' swear b'fore me like that? Not another word! I won't have it! I declare I won't have it another minute!

At first her projected words had slid from his mind as if striking against ice, but at last he heeded her. His face grew sour with passion and misery—he spoke in tones dark with dislike.

‘Th’ ’ell yeh won’t? Whatter yeh goin’ t’ do ’bout it?’ Then, as if he considered that he had not been sufficiently impressive, he arose and slowly walked over to her. Having arrived at point-blank range he spoke again. ‘Whatter yeh goin’ t’ do ’bout it?’ He regarded her then with an unaltering scowl, albeit his mien was as dark and cowering as that of a condemned criminal.

She threw out her hands in the gesture of an impotent one. He was acknowledged victor. He took his hat and slowly left her.

For three days they lived in silence. He brooded upon his mother's agony and felt a singular joy in it. As opportunity offered, he did little despicable things. He was going to make her abject. He was now uncontrolled, ungoverned; he wished to be an emperor. Her suffering was all a sort of compensation for his own dire pains.

She went about with a gray, impassive face. It was as if she had survived a massacre in which all that she loved had been torn from her by the brutality of savages.

One evening at six he entered and stood

looking at his mother as she peeled potatoes. She had hearkened to his coming listlessly, without emotion, and at his entrance she did not raise her eyes.

‘Well, I’m fired!’ he said suddenly.

It seemed to be the final blow. Her body gave a convulsive movement in the chair. When she finally lifted her eyes, horror possessed her face. Her underjaw had fallen. ‘Fired? Outa work? Why—George?’

He went over to the window and stood with his back to her. He could feel her gray stare upon him.

‘Yes! Fired!’

At last she said:

‘Well, whatter yeh goin’ t’ do?’

He tapped the pane with his finger-nail.

He answered in a tone made hoarse and unnatural by an assumption of gay carelessness :

‘ Oh, nothin’ !’

She began, then, her first weeping.

‘ Oh—George—George—George——

He looked at her, scowling.

‘ Ah, whatter yeh givin’ us ? Is this all I git when I come home f’m being fired ? Anybody ’ud think it was my fault. I couldn’t help it.’

She continued to sob in a dull, shaking way. In the pose of her head there was an expression of her conviction that comprehension of her pain was impossible to the universe.

He paused for a moment, and then, with his usual tactics, went out, slamming

the door. A pale flood of sunlight, imperturbable at its vocation, streamed upon the little old woman, bowed with pain, forlorn in her chair.

XV.

KELCEY was standing on the corner next day when three little boys came running. Two halted some distance away, and the other came forward.

He halted before Kelcey, and spoke importantly.

‘Hey, your ol’ woman’s sick.’

‘What?’

‘Your ol’ woman’s sick.’

‘Git out!’

‘She is, too!’

‘Who tol’ yeh?’

' Mis' Callahan. She said fer me t' run an' tell yeh. Dey want yeh.'

A swift dread struck Kelcey. Like flashes of light little scenes from the past shot through his brain. He had thoughts of a vengeance from the clouds.

As he glanced about him the familiar view assumed a meaning that was ominous and dark. There was prophecy of disaster in the street, the buildings, the sky, the people. Something tragic and terrible in the air was known to his nervous, quivering nostrils. He spoke to the little boy in a tone that quavered.

' All right !'

Behind him he felt the sudden contemplative pause of his companions of the gang. They were watching him. As he went rapidly up the street he knew that

they had come out to the middle of the walk and were staring after him. He was glad that they could not see his face, his trembling lips, his eyes quavering in fear.

He stopped at the door of his home and stared at the panel as if he saw written thereon a word. A moment later he entered. His eye comprehended the room in a frightened glance.

His mother sat gazing out at the opposite walls and windows. She was leaning her head upon the back of the chair. Her face was overspread with a singular pallor, but the glance of her eyes was strong, and the set of her lips was tranquil.

He felt an unspeakable thrill of thanksgiving at seeing her seated there calmly.

‘Why, mother, they said yeh was sick,’

he cried, going toward her impetuously.

‘What’s th’ matter?’

She smiled at him.

‘Oh, it ain’t nothin’! I on’y got kinda dizzy, that’s all.’

Her voice was sober, and had the ring of vitality in it.

He noted her commonplace air. There was no alarm or pain in her tones, but the misgivings of the street, the prophetic twinges of his nerves, made him still hesitate.

‘Well—are you sure it ain’t? They scared me ’bout t’ death.’

‘No, it ain’t anything, o’ny some sorta dizzy feelin’. I fell down b’hind th’ stove. Missis Calahan, she came an’ picked me up. I must ’a laid there fer quite a while. Th’ doctor said he guessed I’d be all right

in a couple 'a hours. I don't feel nothin' !'

Kelcey heaved a great sigh of relief.

'Lord, I was scared !' He began to beam joyously, since he was escaped from his fright. 'Why, I couldn't think what had happened,' he told her.

'Well, it ain't nothin',' she said.

He stood about awkwardly, keeping his eyes fastened upon her in a sort of surprise, as if he had expected to discover that she had vanished. The reaction from his panic was a thrill of delicious contentment. He took a chair and sat down near her, but presently he jumped up to ask :

'There ain't nothin' I can get for yeh, is ther ?'

He looked at her eagerly. In his eyes

shone love and joy. If it were not for the shame of it, he would have called her endearing names.

‘No, ther ain’t nothin’,’ she answered. Presently she continued, in a conversational way: ‘Yeh ain’t found no work yit, have yeh?’

The shadow of his past fell upon him then, and he became suddenly morose. At last he spoke in a sentence that was a vow, a declaration of change.

‘No, I ain’t, but I’m going t’ hunt fer it hard, you bet.’

She understood from his tone that he was making peace with her. She smiled at him gladly.

‘Yer a good boy, George!’ A radiance from the stars lit her face.

Presently she asked :

'D' yeh think yer old boss would take yeh on ag'in if I went t' see him ?'

'No,' said Kelcey at once. 'It wouldn't do no good! They got all th' men they want. There ain't no room there. It wouldn't do no good.' He ceased to beam for a moment as he thought of certain disclosures. 'I'm goin' t' try to git work everywheres. I'm going t' make a wild break t' get a job, an' if there's one anywheres I'll get it.'

She smiled at him again.

'That's right, George !'

When it came supper-time he dragged her in her chair over to the table, and then scurried to and fro to prepare a meal for her. She laughed gleefully at him. He was awkward and densely ignorant. He exaggerated his helplessness sometimes

until she was obliged to lean back in her chair to laugh. Afterward they sat by the window. Her hand rested upon his hair.

XVI.

WHEN Kelcey went to borrow money from old Bleecker, Jones and the others, he discovered that he was below them in social position. Old Bleecker said gloomily that he did not see how he could loan money at that time. When Jones asked him to have a drink, his tone was careless.

O'Connor recited at length some bewildering financial troubles of his own. In them all he saw that something had been reversed. They remained silent

upon many occasions when they might have grunted in sympathy for him.

As he passed along the street near his home he perceived Fidsey Corcoran and another of the gang. They made eloquent signs.

‘Are yeh wid us?’

He stopped and looked at them.

‘What’s wrong with yeh?’

‘Are yeh wid us er not?’ demanded Fidsey. ‘New barkeep!’ Big can! We got it over in d’ lot. Big can, I tell yeh.’

He drew a picture in the air, so to speak, with his enthusiastic fingers.

Kelcey turned dejectedly homeward.

‘Oh, I guess not, this roun’.

‘What’s d’ matter wi’che?’ said Fidsey.

‘Yer gittin’ t’ be a reg’lar willie! Come ahn, I tell yeh! Youse gits one smoke at

d' can b'cause yeh b'longs t' d' gang, an' yeh don't wanta give it up widout er scrap! See? Some udder john 'll get yer smoke. Come ahn !'

When they arrived at the place among the boulders in the vacant lot, one of the band had a huge and battered tin can tilted afar up. His throat worked convulsively. He was watched keenly and anxiously by five or six others. Their eyes followed carefully each fraction of distance that the can was lifted. They were very silent.

Fidsey burst out violently as he perceived what was in progress :

' Heh, Tim, yeh big sojer, let go d' can ! What 'a yeh tink ! Wese er in dis ! Le' go dat !'

He who was drinking made several

angry protesting contortions of his throat. Then he put down the can and swore.

‘Who’s a big sojer? I ain’t gittin’ more’n me own smoke! Yer too bloomin’ swift! Ye’d tink yeh was d’ on’y mug what owned dis can! Close yer face while I gits me smoke!’

He took breath for a moment, and then returned the can to its tilted position.

Fidsey went to him and worried and clamoured. He interfered so seriously with the action of drinking that the other was obliged to release the can again for fear of choking.

Fidsey grabbed it, and glanced swiftly at the contents.

‘Dere! Dat’s what I was hollerin’ at! Lookut d’ beer! Not ’nough t’ wet yer

t'roat! Yehs can't have notin' on d' level wid youse damn' tanks! Youse was a reg'lar resevoi, Tim Connigan! Look what yeh lef' us! Ah, say, youse was a dandy! What 'a yeh tink we ah? Willies? Don' we want no smoke? Say, lookut dat can! It's drier'n hell! What 'a yeh tink?'

Tim glanced in at the beer. Then he said:

'Well, d' mug what come b'fore me, he on'y lef' me dat much. Blue Billie, he done d' swallerin'! I on'y had a tas'e!'

Blue Billie, from his seat near, called out in wrathful protest:

'Yeh lie, Tim. I never had more'n a mouf-ful!' An inspiration evidently came to him then, for his countenance suddenly

brightened, and, arising, he went toward the can. 'I ain't had me reg'lar smoke yit! Guess I come in aheader Fidsey, don't I?'

Fidsey, with a sardonic smile, swung the can behind him.

'I guess nit! Not dis minnet! Youse hadger smoke. If yeh ain't, yeh don't git none. See?'

Blue Billie confronted Fidsey determinedly.

'D' 'ell I don't!'

'Nit,' said Fidsey.

Billie sat down again.

Fidsey drank his portion. Then he manœuvred skilfully before the crowd until Kelcey and the other youth took their shares.

'Youse er a mob 'a tanks,' he told the

gang. 'Nobody 'ud git not'in' if dey wasn't on t' yehs!'

Blue Billie's soul had been smouldering in hate against Fidsey.

'Ah, shut up! Youse ain't got a take care 'a dose two mugs, dough. Youse hadger smoke, ain't yeh? Den yer tr'u. G' home!'

'Well, I hate t' see er bloke use 'imself for a tank,' said Fidsey. 'But youse don't wanta go jollyin' 'round 'bout d' can, Blue, er youse'll git done.'

'Who'll do me?' demanded Blue Billie, casting his eye about him.

'Kel' will,' said Fidsey bravely.

'D' 'el he will!'

'Dat's what he will!'

Blue Billie made the gesture of a warrior.

'He never saw d' day 'a his life dat he could do me little finger. If 'e says much t' me, I'll push 'is face all over d' lot.'

Fidsey called to Kelcey.

'Say, Kel, hear what dis mug is chewin'?'

Kelcey was apparently deep in other matters. His back was half-turned.

Blue Billie spoke to Fidsey in a battleful voice.

'Did 'e ever say 'e could do me?'

Fidsey said:

'Soitenly 'e did. Youse is dead easy, 'e says. He says he kin punch holes in you, Blue!'

'When did 'e say it?'

'Oh—any time. Youse is a cinch, Kel' says.'

Blue Billie walked over to Kelcey. The

others of the band followed him, exchanging joyful glances.

‘Did youse say yeh could do me?’

Kelcey slowly turned, but he kept his eyes upon the ground. He heard Fidsey darting among the others, telling of his prowess, preparing them for the downfall of Blue Billie. He stood heavily on one foot and moved his hands nervously. Finally he said in a low growl: ‘Well, what if I did?’

The sentence sent a happy thrill through the band. It was a formidable question. Blue Billie braced himself. Upon him came the responsibility of the next step. The gang fell back a little upon all sides. They looked expectantly at Blue Billie.

He walked forward with a delib-

erate step until his face was close to Kelcey.

‘Well, if you did,’ he said, with a snarl between his teeth, ‘I’m goin’ t’ t’ump d’ life outa yeh right heh!’

A little boy, wild of eye and puffing, came down the slope as from an explosion. He burst out in a rapid treble :

‘Is dat Kelcey feller here? Say, yeh ol’ woman’s sick again. Dey want yeh! Yeh’s better run! She’s awful sick!’

The gang turned with loud growls. ‘Ah, git outa here!’ Fidsey threw a stone at the little boy and chased him a short distance, but he continued to clamour :

‘Youse better come, Kelcey feller! She’s awful sick! She was hollerin’! Dey been lookin’ for yeh over’n hour!’

In his eagerness he returned part way, regardless of Fidsey.

Kelcey had moved away from Blue Billie. He said :

‘ I guess I’d better go.’ They howled at him. ‘ Well,’ he continued, ‘ I can’t—I don’t wanta—I don’t wanta leave me mother be—she——’

His words were drowned in the chorus of their derision. ‘ Well, looka-here,’ he would begin, and at each time their cries and screams ascended. They dragged at Blue Billie. ‘ Go for ’im, Blue ! Slug ’im ! Go ahn !’

Kelcey went slowly away while they were urging Blue Billie to do a decisive thing.

Billie stood fuming and blustering and explaining himself. When Kelcey

had achieved a considerable distance from him, he stepped forward a few paces and hurled a terrible oath. Kelcey looked back darkly.

XVII.

WHEN he entered the chamber of death he was brooding over the recent encounter and devising extravagant revenges upon Blue Billie and the others.

The little old woman was stretched upon her bed. Her face and hands were of the hue of the blankets. Her hair, seemingly of a new and wondrous grayness, hung over her temples in whips and tangles. She was sickeningly motionless, save for her eyes, which rolled and swayed in maniacal glances.

A young doctor had just been administering medicine.

'There,' he said, with a great satisfaction, 'I guess that'll do her good!' As he went briskly towards the door he met Kelcey. 'Oh,' he said. 'Son?'

Kelcey had that in his throat which was like fur. When he forced his voice the words came first low and then high, as if they had broken through something.

'Will she—will she——'

The doctor glanced back at the bed. She was watching them as she would have watched ghouls, and muttering.

'Can't tell,' he said. 'She's a wonderful woman! Got more vitality than you and I together! Can't tell! May—may not! Good-day! Back in two hours.'

In the kitchen Mrs. Calahan was fever-

ishly dusting the furniture, polishing this and that. She arranged everything in decorous rows. She was preparing for the coming of death. She looked at the floor as if she longed to scrub it.

The doctor paused to speak in an undertone to her, glancing at the bed. When he departed she laboured with a renewed speed.

Kelcey approached his mother. From a little distance he called to her: 'Mother—mother——' He proceeded with caution lest this mystic being upon the bed should clutch at him. 'Mother—mother—don't yeh know me?' He put forth apprehensive, shaking fingers and touched her hand.

There were two brilliant steel-coloured points upon her eyeballs. She was staring off at something sinister.

Suddenly she turned to her son in a wild babbling appeal :

‘ Help me ! Help me ! Oh, help me ! I see them coming.’

Kelcey called to her as to a distant place. ‘ Mother ! Mother !’ She looked at him, and then there began within her a struggle to reach him with her mind. She fought with some implacable power whose fingers were in her brain. She called to Kelcey in stammering, incoherent cries for help. Then she again looked away.

‘ Ah, there they come ! There they come ! Ah, look—look—loo——’ She arose to a sitting posture without the use of her arms.

Kelcey felt himself being choked. When her voice pealed forth in a scream he saw crimson curtains moving before his eyes.

‘ Mother—oh, mother—there’s nothin’—there’s nothin’——’

She was at a kitchen-door with a dish-cloth in her hand. Within there had just been a clatter of crockery. Down through the trees of the orchard she could see a man in a field ploughing.

‘ Bill — o-o-oh, Bill — have yeh seen Georgie? Is he out there with you? Georgie! Georgie! Come right here this minnet! Right—this—minnet!’

She began to talk to some people in the room :

‘ I want t’ know what yeh want here! I want yeh t’ git out! I don’t want yeh here! I don’t feel good t’-day, an’ I don’t want yeh here! I don’t feel good t’-day! I want yeh t’ git out!’ Her voice became peevish. ‘ Go away! Go away! Go away!’

Kelcey lay in a chair. His nerveless arms allowed his fingers to sweep the floor. He became so that he could not hear the chatter from the bed, but he was always conscious of the ticking of the little clock out on the kitchen shelf.

When he aroused, the pale-faced but plump young clergyman was before him.

‘My poor lad!’ began this latter.

The little old woman lay still with her eyes closed. On the table at the head of the bed was a glass containing a water-like medicine. The reflected lights made a silver star on its side. The two men sat side by side, waiting. Out in the kitchen Mrs. Calahan had taken a chair by the stove and was waiting.

Kelcey began to stare at the wall-paper. The pattern was clusters of brown roses.

He felt them like hideous crabs crawling upon his brain.

Through the doorway he saw the oil-cloth covering of the table catching a glimmer from the warm afternoon sun. The window disclosed a fair, soft sky, like blue enamel, and a fringe of chimneys and roofs, resplendent here and there. An endless roar, the eternal trample of the marching city, came mingled with vague cries. At intervals the woman out by the stove moved restlessly and coughed.

Over the transom from the hall-way came two voices.

‘Johnnie!’

‘Wot!’

‘You come right here t’ me! I want yehs t’ go t’ d’ store fer me!’

‘Ah, ma, send Sally!’

‘ No, I will not ! You come right here !’

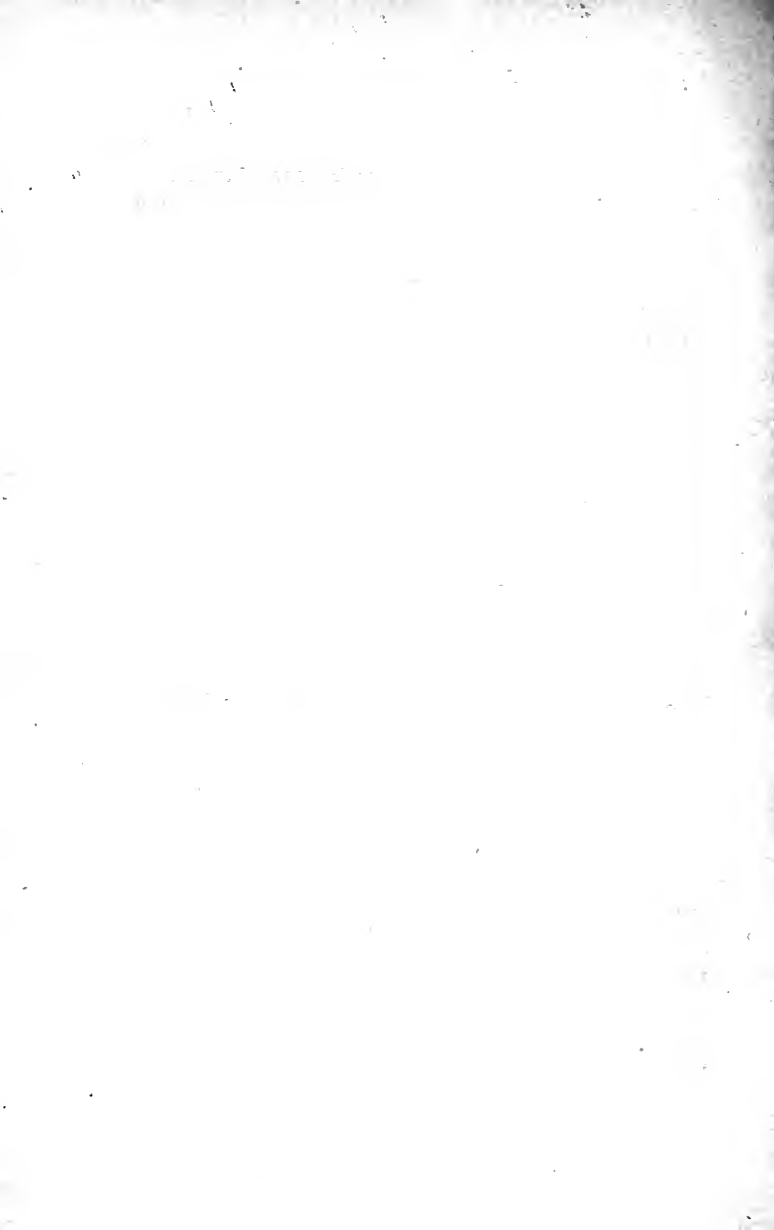
‘ All right, in a minnet !’

‘ Johnnie !’

‘ In a minnet, I tell yeh !’

‘ Johnnie——’ There was the sound of a heavy tread, and later a boy squealed. Suddenly the clergyman started to his feet. He rushed forward and peered. The little old woman was dead.

THE END.



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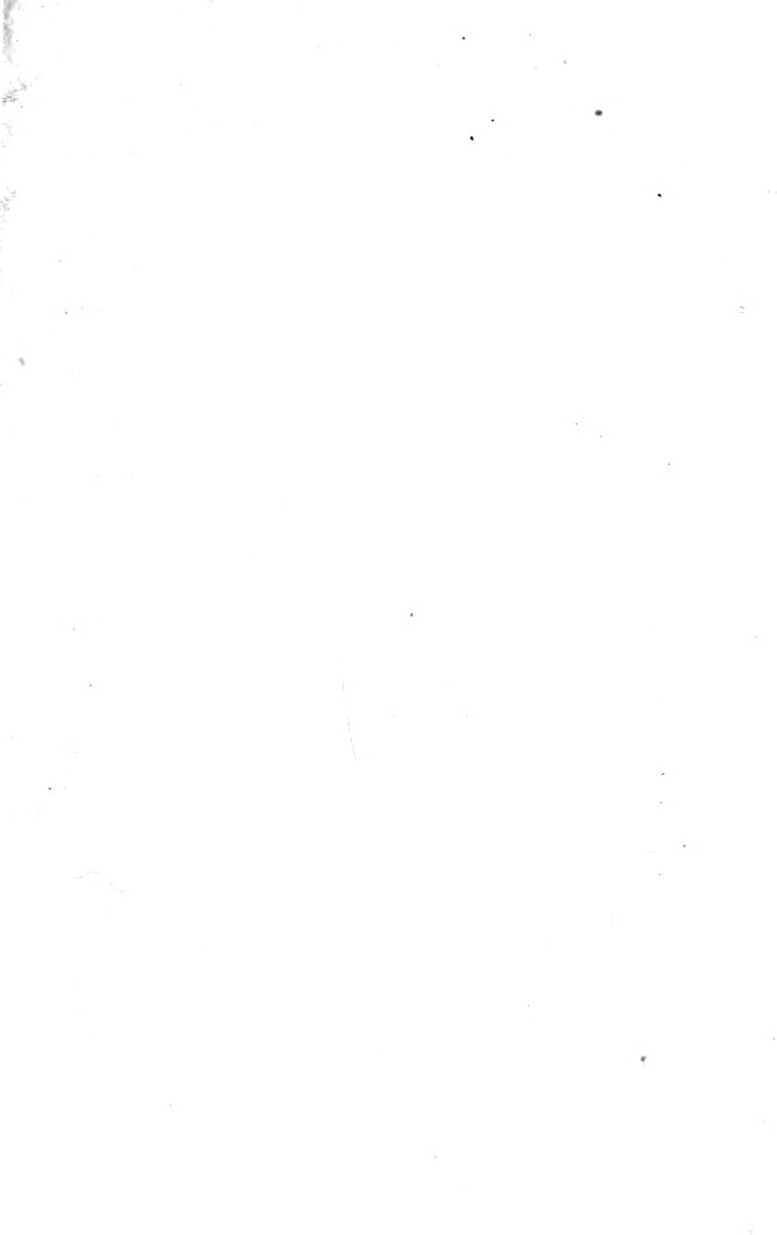
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